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THE LAST ENCHANTMENTS

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By



Robert
Liddell

New York
APPLETON-CENTURY-CROFTS
Incorporated

ROBERT LIDDELL

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In
Memory of
My Brother

THE LAST ENCHANTMENTS

1

THE great university city of Christminster, as everyone knows, is situated on the verge of Wessex. Its lights, seen from afar, were like a beacon to that ambitious Wessex lad, Jude Fawley. No more need be said about its topography, how it connects with the river or railway systems of the country. If the people in this story go "on the river," it does not matter whether they go on the Cam or on the Cherwell. If they go up to London, we need not follow them to see whether they pass by Reading or by Bishop's Stortford, or if they arrive at Liverpool Street or at Paddington.

Two main roads run northwards from Christminster, to Woodbury or Banstock, and on into East Anglia or the Midlands, it may be presumed; it does not concern us what happens to them later on. But on these roads, just above their confluence, and in the triangle between them, a prosperous suburb has grown up. One of our poets has called it a "base and brickish skirt" to the old venerable city. He spoke hastily. Here on either side of boulevards planted with chestnuts, is some of the most remarkable domestic architecture in Europe. Towering yellow brick piles, embellished with Purbeck shafts and freestone copings,

house the theological colleges of "modern churchmen." In a quarter of an hour's walk the student can observe examples of almost every kind of gothic window: Angevin, Venetian, Spanish and many more. Square and saddleback towers abound. Further up, there are red brick mansions, several of which claim Ruskin as their architect, and show each some notable feature, such as a carved pediment to a porch, or a lavish display of dog-tooth ornament. Still further north are smaller houses, though still large by contemporary standards, that were built after the apogee of the Gothic Revival and show only a general deference to the pointed style.

Everywhere flourish the lovely trees that are justly dear to suburbia: the chestnut, the lilac, the cherry, the laburnum, the hawthorn and the copper beech. I like to apply to this part of our city the words of another of our poets, who spoke of Christminster as "spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the middle age." And thanks to the ribbon development along the main thoroughfares, often and ignorantly deplored by those who look at the country only from their cars, North Christminster is long and narrow. East or west, you can soon get into the real country, and that the most harmonious in England. It is a countryside neither bleak nor lush, neither desert nor cut up into small fields, neither flat nor precipitous. Man and Nature have lived here for centuries on civil, equal terms, neither dominating the other. There is no better place to live in.

Those who have only known Christminster as undergraduates often think the lives of its residents are very uneventful. Houses in the north, they fancy, only open, and their inhabitants only wake up, in order to give them tea on Sundays. But undergraduates are particularly prone to what Monsieur Jean Paulhan has called the "illusion of totality"; that is, to constructing extensive pictures of people and manners on the basis of their slender shreds of experience. One of them once had the face to tell me that a Christminster lady thought of nothing but the peerage, because one day she had conveyed to him a trifling bit of general knowledge, such as the fact that the Duke of Portland lived at Welbeck. I do not pretend to know all her mind, but her published work suggests that she must also have devoted a good deal of thought to the poetry of Crabbe and Clare.

To young men of this sort, it would be an astonishing revelation that the residents needed a warning against tale-bearing. What could they have to blab, chatter or whisper about except the undergraduates? And they only see them on their best behavior and in their neat, blue suits at Sunday tea parties. A "Christminster novel" is always about the loves and hatreds and rivalries of the young—and very boring they generally are, and not always quite proper. They have more sex than love in them, for sex needs only an adolescent body—while love (if it is to interest anyone beside the principals) must have a mature personality to act upon.

I myself have worn the gown in Christminster, in-

finitely greater though my attachment to the town has since become. And it was through no discernment of my own, but only through what my friend Cyprian used to tell me, that I early learned that the real romance of our city was to be found in the Gothic North.

To be precise, Cyprian was not his name, but what he liked to be called, and he was not my friend, for we did not really like each other—but as we lived on the same staircase, habit and laziness caused us to spend a lot of time together at one period in our university careers. Cyprian was a student of Human Nature, he said (he took a very bad degree in History). He used to do field work in the residential suburbs where, he told me, life was real and earnest. Sometimes he carried his researches further afield: he was engaged, simultaneously, to the daughters of two or three clergymen in the next county. He showed me some of their letters, and the water colors they had painted or the tea cloths they had worked for his rooms in college.

"It's all good practice," he answered, when once I ventured to criticize this way of life—but he never told me what it was practice for. "And they will have had their ideal," he added complacently. "Andrew, you'll ruin your handkerchief with that kettle. I must give you the kettle holder Penelope worked for me."

He let them down lightly. His letters became fewer and not quite so affectionate, or they were a little too full of his tutor's beautiful (and entirely imaginary) niece. Noble and tear-stained letters came in reply from

Steeple Crampton or Denton Prior, giving him his release. The writers said they would always follow his career with interest—and they must have found it difficult to follow, for it never came to much, and was rather devious.

I should have hesitated to go with Cyprian on one of his more distant and compromising excursions, but I let him take me out to tea in the Woodbury road now and then—he would not be likely to run into any entanglements so dangerously near. Nevertheless his incursions into that territory were more adventurous than mine. He tutored, spasmodically, backward or delicate youths in subjects with which he had the most superficial acquaintance, at coaching establishments in those parts. And on summer nights he used to rob some of the gardens there spread out to the moonlight, of branches of lilac to decorate his rooms with.

To him I owe my first introduction to Mrs. Foyle.

“Who is Mrs. Foyle?” I asked.

“Well, to begin with, she’s Miranda Foyle’s mother,” he answered.

As I knew that Miranda Foyle was somebody, and as I could not remember who, and as I had lately shown in front of Cyprian too much ignorance of who was who to feel inclined to ask him for enlightenment, this got me no further.

“Rather a tragic little person,” he said. “She worships her daughter. She made her career—and now, of course, there’s nothing left for her to do about it,

except to adore from a distance and to live on past glories. And—don't be alarmed when you see her, Andrew—she hasn't any fingers."

"How very nasty!" I couldn't help exclaiming. "Do you mean she lost them, or that she never had any?"

"We all want to know that," said Cyprian eagerly. "Her husband was a very wicked man, a sea captain—in the Merchant Service, I suspect. She's not quite out of the top drawer. Some people think he cut them off—like the scissor-man in *Struwelpeter*."

"Don't!" I said.

"I see him doing it with a cutlass," said Cyprian dreamily, "holding her hands down on the kitchen-table. . . ."

And yet I should hardly have noticed Mrs. Foyle's hands if I had not been warned. She kept them crooked, so that one could not see where the stumps ended. Nature, or Captain Foyle, had spared her at least one joint of the fingers. She did not shake hands, but that is perfectly normal in Christminster—a sign that one belongs to the gown rather than to the town. She manipulated her teapot without clumsiness, and drank a cup of tea—I learned later that she never ate in public.

The front drawing room—Mrs. Foyle occupied the ground floor and basement of the house—was only lit by a cheerful fire when we arrived. It was an October afternoon, not yet dusk—a faint light still came in from the bay window. Over the fireplace were several very theatrical photographs of the same young woman, from which I concluded that Miranda must be an actress, although I could not remember anything I had heard

of her. Three young women, trying more or less successfully not to look like undergraduates, were distributed round the fire, with chairs left vacant between them. Our hostess placed us in two of these chairs, and the third was presently taken by a young don from one of the colleges. From his talk I began to learn Who was Who, for he was rather proud of knowing.

"Isn't it lovely having Ursula up at St. Monica's, Basil?" said Mrs. Foyle.

"It must bring back the old days for you," he said. "It's like having Miranda up again." He turned to Miss Elliot, the most sophisticated-looking of the girls. "You know I was staying with Peter and Miranda in the vacation?" he said. "I was sorry not to find you at Kellynch, Ursula. Miranda told me you were quite emancipated nowadays; off to Salzburg, or somewhere."

There was talk about "Peter's new play." Bits of information, old and new, began to fit together in my mind. The Elliots were baronets, they had a place in Somerset called Kellynch; the present man, Sir Peter, was a well-known actor; he had married Miranda Foyle. Ursula was his youngest sister.

I might have picked up more about their connections, had I bothered to listen to Basil Morris. "I'm so fond of your cousin, Lord Dalrymple," he said to Ursula. "What a charming old man!"

Lord Dalrymple, as even I knew, was an arrogantly misanthropic minor poet, renowned for his peculiarly cold and brutal rudeness. I decided that Morris's conversation was more revealing about himself than about

anyone else—and his was not a personality about which I felt the desire to be more fully informed.

Still Mrs. Foyle made no move to turn on the lights. The room sank into firelit darkness, while Morris tried to talk Society to Ursula Elliot, and she tried to talk Theater to him. Mrs. Foyle broke in upon them whenever either subject allowed her to say anything to the greater glory of her daughter. The girl next me began to talk very earnestly about social problems. Did I think, she asked, that we had the *right* to concern ourselves with anything else in these difficult days?

"Yes," I said laconically; which she found rather discouraging, I suppose, for she looked silently into the fire, and away from me. This gave me leisure to wonder if Cyprian were tampering with the affections of the girl next to him—as indeed he was. Ursula had no doubt chosen rather stupid girls to bring with her, to set off her personality. Though she was really very kind to Mrs. Foyle, it was not likely that she would bring her grander friends to her house.

I was somewhat uncharitable about it all to Cyprian afterwards. I said that our hostess was too intense and rather vulgar, that Morris was a snob, and that the undergraduates were rather negative. And the darkness was really very odd. I did not think that I wanted to go again.

Cyprian, I could see, as well as having his studies of human nature to pursue, was interested in Miranda Foyle and in the Elliot connection. I told him brutally that I was quite sure, however much he frequented Mrs. Foyle, it would get him no nearer to Kellynch.

"You never know," said Cyprian gravely. "One can't afford to miss any chances, if one wants to get *on*."

I laughed very unsympathetically.

"That's so unkind, and so like you," said Cyprian peevishly. "Because you have some money yourself, you forget other people haven't . . . etc." No need to detail the familiar and boring argument. Cyprian was apt to talk as if the possession of a small competence ought to put me beyond every kind of worry, and above every human weakness—and as if the lack of a similar competence justified and explained every silly thing he did. Apparently if he had had three hundred a year of his own, or even two hundred and fifty, he could have afforded not to be stage-struck or snobbish. This I very much doubt; but at least it might have purified his heart of the worse vice of envy. It is hard for the poor to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

"I forget how you know Mrs. Foyle," I said.

"Oh, my sister-in-law lodged with her when she was a home-student."

I need not have bothered to decide against going again: Cyprian was asked to bring someone else. Mrs. Foyle was carefully constructing her little parties round Ursula, and I had not fitted very well into the picture; the girl allotted to me hadn't liked me. In short, I had achieved the success the shy and misanthropic sometimes achieve. One's timidity and boredom are mistaken for arrogance, and one is not invited again, and everyone is pleased. Cyprian went there several times more and tried to represent it to me as a valuable privilege from which I was excluded—

Miranda was always to be there the next time. Then he told me, as if it were his own discovery, that it "led nowhere"—and I found out, by a little judicious inquiry, that he also had ceased to please, and was not asked any more.

During his last year I once remarked to him: "I wonder if Mrs. Foyle is still giving tea parties in the gloaming."

"It's extraordinary that you can think of nothing but Mrs. Foyle," said Cyprian, also a victim to the "illusion of totality." He had interrupted me, just as I was regretfully coming to the conclusion that I should never understand Kant—so perhaps I was all the more annoyed at the suggestion that I had a trivial mind, from a fear that there might be some truth in it.

"The people were ordinary enough," I said, "but the atmosphere was so unusual, that darkness, and those carefully spaced out girls. . . ."

"It was just silly naughtiness," said Cyprian. "She used to carry on in quite a shocking way. She got struck off the list of the home-students' approved landladies or chaperons. My sister-in-law had to leave her, almost at a moment's notice. But she was sorry for the poor old thing. That's why she asked me to call on her."

"Her daughter must have found her a trial," I observed.

"Miranda *loathes* her," said Cyprian. He went on to tell me a story of how his sister-in-law, taking a country walk with another girl, had met Miranda weeping at a bus stop. She confessed that she had been hounded out by her mother, always remorselessly anxious for

her social advancement, to a country house near a neighboring village where the "best people" from Christminster often dropped in on Sundays. The poor girl had had only the very vaguest invitation to Crome, and was going in an agony of shame, but she dared not face her mother again without having made an attempt to penetrate into this desirable circle. Her courage was rewarded, for she met Sir Peter there and he gave her a lift home in his car—but for that, and for many other humiliations, she had never forgiven her mother.

I was afraid that Cyprian would draw from this tale the moral that it pays to push. Luckily he drew another conclusion. "I don't suppose Mrs. Foyle is ever allowed at Kellynch," he said.

I asked him if he had been making any other interesting researches in our suburbs, and he told me that he had received an invitation to an evening party in one old gentleman's house, at which Satan was expected to be present. Another Christminster worthy, apparently bishop of some curious sect, had laid his hands on Cyprian's head one afternoon as they were finishing tea and had forcibly ordained him a deacon. Into these varieties of religious experience I lacked the courage to accompany him.

2

SOME of these things I remembered later on, when I settled in a flat in North Christminster with my brother Stephen. I was pursuing some rather desultory research in the university library, and Stephen, who had formerly been at Oxford, had come to live with me and to study music. We may very likely have added to the district's reputation for eccentricity, and we may have given the earwigs more to whisper about. When we were by ourselves we rarely answered the door bell, unless we happened to be expecting the fish, or a parcel of books from the town. As our neighbors were probably observant enough to know that we were at home, even if it was not confirmed by the sound of a piano or a gramophone, they thought this very odd. We were, what I daresay is a rare phenomenon, self-sufficient and contented people—when the weather was good (an uncommon event) we were even happy.

Anyway we enjoyed a degree of felicity and independence which was enough to annoy other people extremely. Our relations and family friends appeared to think it a duty to shake us up, and it was a duty they found horribly congenial. They thought us idle, though we worked quite hard, because we were not

making money—which we were able to get on without, and because we were not occupying “positions”—which we did not want; and they thought us “selfish” because we were not preparing to support wives and families, which we wanted even less. Admittedly we were doing nothing that they could boast about—as they would have boasted, had I been in some legation, for instance, or had Stephen been “doing brilliantly” in India, or had either of us been engaged to Ursula Elliot. We were depriving them of a legitimate gratification, even if it was one that we were by no means obliged to provide.

“What,” asked Aunt Anne, “would your father have said?”

I told her that his wishes, which could now, alas, only be conjectured, weighed with me less than Stephen’s and my own, which we very well knew. I am afraid she thought this very wicked and cynical, for she was always much more afraid of our father than we were. In fact the late Colonel Faringdon was an extremely nice man who would have thought his sons’ happiness a matter of more importance than any ambitions for them which he may at one time have entertained.

Cyprian’s sister-in-law, Mary Tucker (his brother was now a Christminster curate) was also too nice to disapprove of us greatly, though she sometimes thought she did.

“My *dears*, what’s the *good* of living in Christminster,” she asked, “if you don’t *know* anyone?”

It was comparatively cheap, we said, there was a

library and there were concerts, we said, and we liked the surrounding country.

"But the most *thrilling* people may be ringing your bell, when you don't answer," said Mary.

"I should always be prepared to risk it," said Stephen.

I upheld him with full conviction, knowing Christminster a great deal better than he did as yet. I do not at all imagine that Mr. Bernard Shaw or Mrs. Woolf ever rang our bell and went empty away—why should they? I know very well the sort of people who may have done so—the sort of people I saw daily in the library, or in the Woodbury road.

Out of our windows we could see a representative selection of our neighbors, and from that vantage point it was quite interesting to study them. In front, we watched them pedaling up and down the Woodbury road; at the back, we could see what was going on in three gardens. In the garden on the right there was a large number of small sheds. We noticed a strange little elderly figure hopping in and out of them. I thought (I have a bad memory for faces) that somewhere I had seen that rather fishlike face and that odd tuft of gray curls that fell away behind into a severe Eton crop.

I asked Mrs. Preston, who came in every morning to "do" for us.

"Yes, sir, it's poor Mrs. Foyle," she said, and laughed heartily.

It is the crowning mercy of our lives that at haphazard, without any effort on our part and far above our deserts, a domestic agency sent us Mrs. Preston.

Usually she is fully engaged, and timid people have often called upon us and tried to make interest with us for an hour or two of her time.

Mrs. Preston knows Christminster so much better than anyone that I had always supposed her to belong to an old family of college servants or of Christminster tradespeople—but she came from another county, although she married into such a family. She had been in extremely good services as a girl, and had an unerring instinct for the smallest social distinctions.

"Poor Mrs. Foyle, sir!" she said. "She used to be very well-known in Christminster, sir." And she gave a laugh which suggested that we should not only hear good of Mrs. Foyle if we were to question her further.

Stephen eagerly began doing so: "Did you ever work for her?"

"Well, yes, sir, in a way," began Mrs. Preston. "It was when her daughter was married, sir, to Sir Peter Elliot. Sir Peter wanted to have it from a hotel, but Mrs. Foyle wouldn't, sir. 'No,' she said to me, 'Mrs. Preston, Miranda shall be married from her home.' "

"That was rather an undertaking for her," I said.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Preston, "but she was quite right—the girl oughtn't to be ashamed of her home, sir."

"It must have flustered her a lot," I said.

"Really, sir, at first I didn't think I could go on, hardly," said Mrs. Preston. "Poor Mrs. Foyle! I said to Mr. Preston, I'd never seen anyone so vice versa. 'Oh, Mrs. Preston,' she said, 'we'll have it all in the garden!' Then the next minute she was for having it in

the drawing room—though there isn't room, sir, not really. I was very firm: 'You leave it all to me, ma'am,' I said."

But it had been a complete success.

"Really in some ways, sir, she was quite sensible," said Mrs. Preston. "'Champagne, Mrs. Preston,' she says, 'I can't run to. But there shall be really good cakes, and iced coffee and lemonade, and strawberries and cream.' And we got a good caterer to do it, sir, and everyone was very pleased. Sir Peter and his mother, sir, thanked me very nicely—oh, she's a very sweet lady, sir, Lady Susan Elliot. And Lady Dalrymple, whom I knew, of course, sir, when they used to live Woodbury way, said: 'Mrs. Preston, you've done wonders; it's all gone off splendidly.'"

"Mrs. Foyle's daughter must have been very much relieved."

"If she was, she didn't say so, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "Not so much as a word of thanks from Lady Elliot. A very hard woman, sir."

"I suppose Mrs. Foyle hadn't all those sheds in the garden that day," said Stephen.

"Didn't she really, sir? She always took such a pride in them," replied Mrs. Preston at random. Her mind had probably strayed on to one of the many domestic matters in her control—what she was to give her mid-day clients for their luncheon, or whether she could persuade us to buy a better carpet sweeper.

"What a bore that you know the woman next door," said Stephen, as Mrs. Preston transferred her activities to his bedroom. He loved hearing about his neighbors,

but found direct contact with them far less stimulating.

However we were forewarned; Mrs Foyle could have no idea of our presence at a first-floor window, while she pottered away among her sheds. And Mrs. Preston was not at all likely to give us away. She did not think this acquaintance would be any addition to us.

"You know, sir, Mrs. Foyle can be very sweet, sir," she said one day. "But not to put too fine a point on it, she isn't a lady, sir. Not the sort of person you could ask your aunts to meet, sir."

Mrs. Preston was apt at times to talk to us, and to other people, as if she had brought us up—and I very much wish she had, for she would have defended us against many things and people that at different times have threatened to submerge us. She had met our aunts, who visited Christminster at the time of our settling in—and references to them helped to give us and herself the illusion that she was an old family servant; and it was an illusion that was comfortable to all parties.

"Now your aunt, Miss Milburn, sir, there's a perfect lady," she said. "Mr. Preston said to me: 'There's a lady from her backbone.'"

Stephen, whose avocations kept him much at home, while mine carried me often into the town, promised to make a study of Mrs. Foyle's habits, so that the inevitable moment of our meeting could at least be delayed as long as possible. In the course of his observations he also learned a good deal about our ground-floor neighbor, who appeared in his garden from time to time. He called me to look and, alas, I saw another possible

danger to our peace. It was an old man who appeared to have got beyond second childhood into a second embryonic stage, whose great head, inadequately supported by a little bent body, I had often seen bowed over a miscellaneous pile of books in the library.

Stephen, always just, though by no means always merciful, owned that it was no fault of mine, but pure bad luck, that I had put him in a way to make two such undesirable acquaintances. Nevertheless he made it clear to me that he thought it only right that I should do my utmost to stave them off.

It might be thought, it would be thought by those who suffer from the "illusion of totality," that Stephen and I thought about nothing except self-preservation from harmless old neighbors who themselves were quite ignorant of our existence. In fact we spent a good deal less time and trouble over it than other people spend in planning their social advancement. And we got more out of it—in itself it was not unamusing as a little game; and it was a little game played for a real stake—for our unencumbered freedom.

It was late October, loveliest of seasons in Christminster where most seasons (in the fine intervals) are lovely. In the clear air the bonfires of dead leaves in Mrs. Foyle's garden, and in Mr. Waterfield's (for that was the name of the old man who lived below us), were sending up their incense like a morning sacrifice. From one of the library windows I could see a weeping ash in a neighboring college garden, like a shower of gold. And in the streets and parks, as a Christminster poetess has written:

They were sweeping up the leaves, to let the people pass
Sweeping up the red leaves, the golden, and the browns,
While the men go to lecture with the wind in their gowns.

A season of energy and hard work, the beginning of the academic year, and the real spring for people engaged in studies of any sort. Stephen and I had plenty to do; we were both working hard. If we had time for any relaxation in the afternoon, it would be to walk into the brown and blue autumn countryside. When a nip in the air made us glad to turn homewards to our fire and to tea, we were thankful to have them to ourselves. Then one could have an hour reading some comfortable book, or listening to music.

The bell pealed as Stephen was changing a record on the gramophone. There is softer music than Brahms's First Symphony, as conducted by Stokowski, and I should think it must have been perfectly audible outside on the landing.

I got up reluctantly to go to the door.

"Don't go," said Stephen. "We will be kind to ourselves."

I hope we were not unkind to anyone else—for indeed we were without the wish to be so—but several people have told me how difficult we were to get hold of. Not that they thought of explaining why they should wish to get hold of us.

3

AMONG my fellow students in the library, Mr. Waterfield was hardly outstanding as an oddity, though anywhere else he would have been remarkable. One is never too old, they say, to start learning, and never too young—and one should learn all one's life long. To everyone, and only a very easily obtained permit is required, the library door stands open: having once entered, it seems unnecessary ever to go out again, except for intervals of food and sleep. It is silly, in the jargon of the age, to call the life among books a "life-substitute"; it is indeed a real life, if a curious submarine one, in that ocean "where each kind can straight its own resemblance find"—and in that life one is apt to suffer a sea change. A newcomer is surprised at the crustaceans scuttling away sideways on the bottom, or at the great goggle-eyed creatures that rise to the surface and gobble for air, until he himself becomes acclimatized, puts on protective coloring, and can no longer be distinguished from other denizens of the aquarium.

At that time the librarian in chief was Dr. Byron, who appeared as inseparable from his straw hat as he was from his terrible swivel eyes. He was a mighty

collector of unconsidered trifles, to whom anything in print was at least a broadsheet, anything written a manuscript. To him the library owed its unrivaled collections of toilet paper and paper bags, subsequently made away with by his successor, Mr. Falconer. Falconer, as his second in command, gave him a loathing that was fully returned: he was a spry, little, bearded figure, who generally got the best of it. Their encounters may be compared with the friendlier and more famous wit combats between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Byron, like the latter, was the Spanish galleon "built far higher in learning, solid and slow in his performance." Falconer, like Shakespeare, the English man-of-war, "lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds." Unlike those great poets, the two librarians believed, and frequently told other people, that they were not on speaking terms. This was very far from being the case.

"Sir, you are the rudest man I have ever met," I once heard Byron bellow.

"Sir, your experience must be severely limited," rejoined Falconer.

Lesser feuds were carried on by people of less importance. One old woman sat for weeks on a reference book that was urgently required by an old man working on the same subject as herself. There was a legend that they were researching into their own pedigrees, with a view to laying claim, each, to the same dormant peerage.

An elderly, shriveled person in a wedding dress often

sat beside me, pursuing some sort of cabalistic study; and near at hand was the great overhanging skull of old Waterfield, across which skin like cracking, yellow parchment was tightly stretched. In spite of his extreme neglect of his appearance—his brown suit was covered with stains and grease spots—he appeared to have taken the pains to touch up his small moustache with blue-black ink. The line of this irrelevant growth was slightly askew to that of his mouth.

I felt I was working in the valley of dry bones—though long ago the mummified mermaid and the skeletons, with which seventeenth-century taste formerly decorated our library, had been swept away. Sometimes I would go to a window for air, and to remind myself that nature went on, and the seasons changed, in a neighboring garden.

*Statt der lebendigen Natur,
Da Gott die Menschen schuf hinein,
Ungreift im Rauch und Moder nur
Dich, Tiergeripp und Totenbein.*

I am afraid that on a damp day I might not be above some Faustian, romantic self-pity for my self-chosen lot.

One morning the great death's-head of old Waterfield appeared beside me at a window and a high, unmodulated voice addressed me in louder tones than the library rules permitted.

"You are Faringdon," he said. "I was electrified to learn that you live in the flat above me. Let us be neigh-

borly. If you will drink tea with me on Saturday, I shall be exceptionally pleased."

He smiled; from the center of his upper jaw projected one solitary, long, greenish-yellow fang.

"My brother is with me at present," I said falsely, as if Stephen were not always with me.

"It will give me pleasure to make his acquaintance."

"I am afraid we are engaged on Saturday," I attempted.

"Sunday will suit me equally well. But on Sunday I suppose you and your brother will be entertaining undergraduates?"

"We don't know any undergraduates!" I exclaimed, in horror at the thought that we should so have conformed to the North Christminster type as to pour out tea once a week for a lot of boys dressed in blue serge suits.

"So it is settled then?" he said eagerly.

"We shall be delighted," I answered weakly, hoping that Stephen would be merciful to my weakness, but by no means sure of it.

Stephen asked Mrs. Preston for information. I was often out when she came, and he was fortunate in seeing more of her. Her conversation made a break in his long hours of practice; I often wished for a like diversion at the library.

"Oh, poor Mr. Waterfield, sir!" And again she laughed heartily.

He had worked, she said, for some coaching establishment in Christminster. He had formerly had a house in the Banstock road full of laborsaving devices,

but he had overspent on them to such an extent that he could not afford to live there and had moved into the flat below us as an economy. An estate in a neighboring county was entailed on him, but the present owner was almost certain to outlive him, and he was believed to be very poor.

Stephen asked Mrs. Preston if she had ever worked for him.

She was quite shocked at the idea. "Oh, no, sir, I could never work for Mr. Waterfield," she said. "No woman who's been in good service could work for him—he's far too dirty, sir."

Stephen observed that he had seen a woman going in.

"Well, Miss Gordon, sir, she's very sweet in some ways," said Mrs. Preston. "But she's not a good class servant, sir. All the same she's far too good for Mr. Waterfield. Sometimes she says to me: 'Mrs. Preston, I don't think I can stay—he's so filthy.' And you know, there's one room she's never allowed in to clean."

Stephen and I were immensely intrigued by the secret chamber, and on our next long walk we speculated about its contents. I was for a library of hair-raising obscenity, but Stephen would not be fobbed off with anything less than human remains. We laughed about it so much that I saw one or two heads turn to look at us, and I am afraid our reputation for eccentricity was further confirmed.

As Mr. Waterfield welcomed us on his doorstep, I saw Stephen twitching with the preliminaries of a *fou rire*. It was soon checked by disappointment.

Our host, beginning to do the honors of his flat,

paused at the door opposite to the entrance. "My study," he said. "I invariably keep it locked. I should not think of permitting my servant to enter."

Stephen gave a strangled hoot of laughter.

Mr. Waterfield hadn't noticed. "I have discovered that if the windows of a room are never opened, it never requires to be dusted," he continued on an even tone. "I will take you in after we have had tea," he added. "Perhaps."

He showed us his bedroom. As we had already seen through the window, for there were no curtains, it was large and bare and contained little but two beds. Both, we observed, had been slept in, and were not made up.

"It may perhaps surprise you," he said, "that I live in solitude, and yet have two beds in use. I will explain. My servant comes three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; on the other days I am free of her. Each time she makes up two beds. I sleep in one bed four nights a week, and in the other for three—being careful to reverse the order in succeeding weeks. Neither bed is slept in for more than two nights in succession, and this only at week ends—with the consequence that the sheets scarcely ever need to be washed."

He was evidently still firmly attached to the principles of laborsaving, although they had nearly been his ruin.

"That is a very good plan," I said.

"I strongly recommend you to try it," he said earnestly. "It obviates the perpetual presence of domestics, which I find disturbing. I am vegetarian in my habits:

on each day that she comes, my servant prepares two, and on Friday three vegetarian dinners. I eat them on succeeding days."

He owned the basement as well as the ground floor, and led the way down there for tea. He indicated our places to us and, after a large sign of the cross, he sat down at the head of the table.

"It was perhaps as well that you elected to come on Sunday," he said. "Milk will be fresher. I buy half a pint of milk on three days a week—Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; but I make it a rule to mix some of Thursday's milk with the milk I drink on Saturday, so that my supply on Monday does not fail. You will be drinking purely milk that was delivered yesterday, and it will of course be perfectly fresh. On the other hand, cakes may be less new. There you are unfortunate in your day, because I buy cakes on Mondays. But I should not think one day would make any very appreciable difference."

The cakes to which he referred looked extremely dry and nasty, but we were obliged to help ourselves from the plate which he pressed upon us.

He rose and leaned over Stephen's shoulder; with horror I observed him drop a small pellet into his cup. The blue-black moustache was slanting more out of line than ever. I kicked my brother's foot under the table, to warn him.

But Mr. Waterfield provided an explanation.

"You have observed that there are cups and saucers, and a hot-water jug, but no teapot? The solution of the mystery is here." He displayed a small tin box.

"Tabloid tea, a perfect beverage," he said. "The tablets are made of compressed teadust. I should on no account allow myself ever to be without a large supply. They are a godsend to me, for I find the washing of a teapot an unpleasant task—and if you make tea several times in an unwashed pot, the taste is disagreeable, as you have probably noticed. Now I merely dirty the teacups; and I have a sufficient supply to be able to leave them to accumulate until the woman comes."

It was an extremely nasty cup of tea. I declined yesterday's milk, and so did Stephen.

"And now," said Mr. Waterfield, his face turning even yellower, "I regret that I must beg you to excuse me for a few moments. I have a small ceremony to perform for which I have to be alone—a small ceremony, but one of importance and, I may say, urgency."

He shambled out of the room; from behind the door we could hear a distressing sound of retching. Under cover of this ceremony we managed to crumble our cake, so as to leave the greater part on our plates.

"I suppose your servant is as unsatisfactory as all her class?" he asked on his return.

We were indignant in Mrs. Preston's defense.

"Perhaps, then, you would care to go shares with me in employing her?" he said. "As she would have two jobs in the same house, we should of course stipulate for paying less than the statutory ninepence an hour—for there is the saving of her time in going from one house to another to be reckoned in."

Stephen hastily told him that Mrs. Preston was fully occupied.

"I regret to hear it," he said. "The woman Gordon does not give me satisfaction. I have discovered that she throws away good food. Often I find good food among the refuse; I retrieve it."

From Stephen's bedroom we had seen him stirring with his umbrella in the dustbin. He always had a little black bag with him—no doubt it served him for a creel.

"The cakes into which you have been tucking, for instance, they were perfect, were they not?" said Mr. Waterfield, fortunately not waiting for an answer. "You will hardly credit it, but Gordon consigned them to the dustbin on Wednesday. Judge of my consternation when that evening I found the cupboard was bare. You had that morning accepted my invitation to tea on Sunday, and I should have had nothing to offer you—for on Monday I buy cakes. I fished them out again."

"I am sure we are very much obliged to you," I said.

"I would do more for you than that," said Mr. Waterfield handsomely. "Of course I wrote Gordon a letter to ask her to explain her conduct—generally I contrive to be out when she comes. Would you believe that she had the effrontery to reply on Friday morning, when she came and found my epistle, that the cakes were moldy, and that she had thrown them away again?"

"Dear me!" said Stephen, who was finding it difficult to retain his composure.

"True, there was a little mold, a little fur, which I removed with a knife," said Mr. Waterfield, "a task which Gordon might well have spared me. I find culinary operations most distasteful. And when I employ a woman I do not expect to have to do menial chores for myself that she could do for me. Which makes me forget what I was going to tell you: you may find it a useful tip. I buy cakes at Baughan's—on Mondays they will let you have at a reduced price cakes that they have failed to sell before the week end. I recommend you to follow my example. Unless you are careful with Christminster tradesmen, you will be rooked right and left.

"And now you would like to see my study," he said, rising from his chair. "Poverty has compelled me to part with some of my treasures, but I have still a few things worth your notice."

His library was splendid: there was a Kelmscott Chaucer, a Doves Press Vergil printed on vellum, an exquisite collection of Foulis and Baskerville printing, and a great folio press full of incunabula and of Aldine texts.

"The humble collection of a poor man," he said. "But I do not regret being a pauper when I remember the Cause. My ancestor, Sir Justin Waterfield, sacrificed all for the cause of Blessed Charles the Martyr. Thank God that he did so! At least I can hold up my head. Here is an *editio princeps* of Erasmus's *Colloquia* which will interest you extremely."

I noticed on the wall a charming late eighteenth-century print of "Kellynch Hall, seat of Sir Walter

Elliot, Bt." It is an extraordinary thing how the same names and places tend to recur in different parts of one's experience—another proof, if any were needed by me, that we are all characters in a vast novel.

I exclaimed upon it.

"My great-grandmother Musgrove was an Elliot of Kellynch," he said. "My great-grandfather was Charles Musgrove, of Uppercross. I understand that the woman next door is mother to the present Lady Elliot. I suppose there may be some affinity between us—it would be remote, as the present baronet descends from a younger branch of my great-grandmother's family. In any case we are not within the forbidden degrees." He chuckled. "Not that it would matter," he added. "Mrs. Foyle does not arouse my amorous propensities."

I asked if he knew her.

"I do not propose to keep up the relationship," said Mr. Waterfield. "I consider that the shades of Kellynch have been polluted. I understand that Sir Peter, my cousin Elliot, was inveigled into marrying his lodging-house keeper's daughter at Christminster. I hardly think that I ought to give my countenance to the marriage; I very much doubt if people call on Lady Elliot.

"I am credibly informed," continued Mr. Waterfield, "that Mrs. Foyle—my connection, as I suppose I must call her, loath as I am to do so—has not a single hair on her whole body. If you are ever able to confirm or deny this singular story authoritatively, you will interest me very much."

Mrs. Preston, we felt sure, would be able to give us the necessary information.

"I am told," he said, "that it is the result of her alarming married life. The late Foyle was a blackguard. I understand he used to throw knives at her. The strain upon her nerves was considerable, and caused her hair to fall out.

"You are surprised at my gossiping," added Mr. Waterfield after a pause. "I find this neighborhood of absorbing interest. You were not living here, I think, at the time when our neighbors on the other side kept a brothel? Miss Gibson, who lives with her mother on the first floor in that house, came to see me about it. She was quite upset. Very naturally there was often a confusion between their visitors. Finally there were unseemly occurrences of a more public nature, and the proctors intervened."

We had for some time been standing, ready to take our leave, but Mr. Waterfield studiously ignored this. He intended us to stay until he had done with us, and then to give us his dismissal.

"Six of the clock!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Do I not hear Polly and Nick striking?" (He employed the cant term for the church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, common in High Church circles.)

"I am afraid I must regretfully show you to the door," he said. "If you should go to evensong, I will ask you to remember me in your devotions. Duty sends me back to my desk: I have many pamphlets to finish."

Instinctively, and without a word to each other, Stephen and I walked to the gate, instead of going straight upstairs to our flat. We needed fresh air after an hour in old Waterfield's hermetically sealed study.

We nearly collided with Mrs. Foyle, who was hurrying down the Woodbury road with a small, stumpy umbrella stuck jauntily under her arm.

"Why, it's Mr. Faringdon!" she exclaimed with delight. "Poor Mary Tucker told me you'd come to live here. And this is your brother? You won't escape me now! When are you coming to tea?"

I followed the direction of Stephen's gaze, which was riveted on Mrs. Foyle's eyebrows: evidently they had been drawn with dark brown chalk. Certainly there was not a hair in them.

4

A READING LAMP as well as the fire was burning when we entered Mrs. Foyle's little drawing room, and Stephen and I were placed without any particular care. The party, we gathered, was to be entirely masculine.

"George Cheeseman is coming," said Mrs. Foyle with an air of satisfaction. "I thought you ought to meet him."

He was a minor literary figure whose name in a list of contributors to a review has always repelled me, in the way I am repelled when I see calcium listed among the ingredients of a patent medicine. I have a notion that too much Cheeseman and too much calcium would disagree with me. Not that I should ever think of buying patent medicines or literary reviews.

"He lodged with me for a long time, during the war," said Mrs. Foyle. "I was so afraid that I was going to have soldiers billeted on me—and then suddenly he and his mother appeared, and asked if I could give them rooms. Oh, my Lord, the relief! They were so helpful and good, too, when Tom was torpedoed."

So that, we noted, was the end of Captain Foyle—always for me a romantic figure, more out of *Treasure Island* or *Peter Pan* than out of real life. I saw him standing on the bridge in a three-cornered hat, and

brandishing—yes, a hook. Analyzing this vision, I came to the conclusion that the hook was derived from his widow's maimed hands, and from the cutlass with which Cyprian had imagined him attacking her. I controlled a smile: I did not wish to set Stephen off laughing.

For her other visitor Mrs. Foyle felt bound to apologize: he was an Iraqi student who formed part of the household in the flat above. We never quite made out who all the other members were, nor what exactly were their financial relations with Mrs. Foyle—whether they were lodgers or subtenants. But for some reason she had thought it a duty to introduce Mr. Galal Shukry to intellectual Christminster: that is, to ourselves and Cheeseman.

"Of course George is devoted to Miranda," Mrs. Foyle informed us. Miranda had only been a school-girl when George Cheeseman went to lodge with her mother, but he had discerned her unusual talents and had encouraged them.

"There were lots of things I couldn't afford to give Miranda," said Mrs. Foyle, "but I did give her people. We always had a circle. Why, in those days I was the pivot of the university!"

Mr. Galal Shukry, finding the front door open, now made an unobtrusive entrance, and his presence continued to be equally unobtrusive. All he wanted, apparently was to sit on the edge of his chair and smile, and listen to the talk, and absorb heavily sweetened cups of tea.

George Cheeseman, we learned, had been a pacifist

and had collected like-minded people around him—and such, inevitably, had been the most interesting people in Christminster during the Great War. Mrs. Foyle, an ardent militarist, had violently opposed them in argument, and had as violently assailed anyone who dared to persecute her friends for their views. When, as sometimes happened, they were hauled off to Christminster jail, she had followed them there—all doors opened to her. She comforted them with Bovril and hot-water bottles, but continued to argue with them.

“I wasn’t going to let them think I believed in their silliness!” she said.

We thought it best to let her know, from the beginning, that our own views on war and peace were much the same as those of the Society of Friends.

“Most young people are silly in that way,” she said tolerantly. “Miranda is just as bad.”

“These young men are of your way of thinking, George,” she said, as Cheeseman came in; he also had found the door open. A curious air of seediness hung over him, not unmixed with contradictory signs of prosperity. He looked, as indeed he was, the kind of author who manages to cast a blight over every topic which he touches—but a refined, deceptive sort of blight, so that people with no independence of judgment would always hesitate to say he was boring, in case he should turn out to be “rather good.”

He gave a half bow, accompanied by a smile of complicity that was intended for us all. Mrs. Foyle hastily attempted to rescue Mr. Shukry from the imputation of being a pacifist.

"You're not one of these people, I'm sure," she said. "You wouldn't let foreigners attack your country?"

"Of course not," said Mr. Shukry, lifting a moustache soaked in tea.

"You'd join the army, of course, if there was a war?"

"It would not be necessary," said Mr. Shukry with dignity. "My father, the Minister, would buy a few bounds, and someone would go instead of me. Only common beobles fight."

Cheeseman winked at us, but we disregarded him; we felt a little sorry for Mrs. Foyle.

"What is your daughter doing at present?" I asked.

The intention was good, but my question revealed a complete lack of interest in the theater; I ought to have known what Miranda was doing.

Sir Peter was doing *Hamlet*, and of course Miranda was Ophelia.

"'Mother,' she said, 'Peter can't bear to play without me, so I shall have to do it. But I would give anything for a quiet autumn at Kellynch.'"

"D'you mean Miranda ought to be taking things quietly just now?" asked Cheeseman, in a slightly feline voice.

"Oh, no, no hope of that!" cried Mrs. Foyle, evidently stung on a raw place. "I've tried to tackle her about it—but she won't listen to me. And Peter's worse. Shakespeare's their baby—it's all the baby they'll ever have."

"Well, if they're happy like that . . ." said Cheeseman tolerantly.

"But she ought to think of the future," said Mrs.

Foyle shrilly. "Peter's not at all strong, and the stage is so drafty. She'll find herself a widow one day; and the William Elliots will be able to turn her out of Kellynch as soon as they like, if there isn't an heir. I've seen Margaret Elliot looking at the family diamonds . . . I don't know what she'd say if she knew Gertrude was wearing them in *Hamlet*. Peter insisted on lending them. Oh, I hope it's a long time before Margaret gets the family diamonds! I hope she doesn't get them till she's dead!"

There was real bitterness in her voice. One could guess her longing to be grandmother to the heir of the Elliots'. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good: Mr. Waterfield might find comfort in thinking that the shades of Kellynch would not be permanently polluted.

"Miranda's really made that house count for something," said Cheeseman, perhaps feeling that he owed Mrs. Foyle a generous remark.

"Hasn't she?" said Mrs. Foyle eagerly. She launched into a description of the brilliance of a house party at Kellynch in the summer. I thought, perhaps with a lack of charity towards all persons concerned, that it sounded just the sort of thing Cyprian would have enjoyed.

There is a distinction between what is fashionable and unfashionable in the Arts, which bears no fixed relation to what is good or bad—and it extends backwards into the past and has a certain permanence, unchanged by passing caprice. For instance, had Miranda been free to summon up the illustrious dead, she would

never have invited Matthew Arnold or George Eliot to Kellynch—their names have no value in smart conversation. But if she could have got hold of Lautréamont or Corvo. . . .

And now, for she was not really a great hostess, it was evident that she got together not so much the fashionable people in the world of Art and Letters (who might, or might not happen to be good), as people who were trying to be fashionable. There is a most unhappy distinction between those who are trying to be good, and those who are trying to be fashionable. To try, however feebly, to be good, must imply some virtues: conscientious workmanship, humility, reverence for the truly great and good. To try to be fashionable is a very different matter.

These reflections were suggested by the names of Miranda's guests, which Mrs. Foyle flung down as if they were trump cards. I had heard of most of these people, and it was rather to their discredit that I should have done so: they had painfully made themselves heard of. And it was obvious that at Kellynch they all sang hard for their supper.

"How I wish you could have heard them!" said Mrs. Foyle. "It was just like a novel by Aldous Huxley."

It must have been—but so much easier to shut up a novel if you are tired of it, than to shut up a brilliant young man or woman. I prefer to have heard Mrs. Foyle's summary, though she assured us that she wasn't doing justice to any of them.

"There was Tony Jenkins, for example, the music

critic, you know—he was so amusing. Every morning he twittered up to Angela Sparrow flapping his wings—I mean his hands—and said: ‘Birdie, birdie, birdie!’ ”

“That would not be very funny,” said Mr. Shukry. “And my teacher tell me, in England it is not bolite to make buns on beoble’s names.”

Mrs. Foyle was undaunted. “It was the way he said it. And Tony said such killing things. For example, Peter was saying how annoyed William Elliot was at being stationed at Sierra Leone—and Tony said, just like this: ‘I fail to see why he should be annoyed at being stationed at Sierra Leone. He will be able to visit the White Man’s Grave.’ ”

Her mimicry was oddly, and cruelly successful; one could see the solemn face, waiting for a laugh at everything it said.

“You must find it quite hard to tear yourself away from Kellynch,” said Cheeseman.

“I always hate leaving Miranda,” said Mrs. Foyle. “But I feel I have to be back in Christminster for term. It’s my place.

“Of course I needn’t be here,” she said, after a pause to poke the fire. “Miranda is always saying: ‘Why not shup up your flat, and come and live with me?’ And I say: ‘Well, my dear, it’s nice of you to ask me—perhaps in my old age—we’ll see.’ I don’t believe in the mother-in-law living with a married couple.”

“Much wiser not,” said Cheeseman.

“But Peter’s just as keen on it as she is,” Mrs. Foyle

quickly put in. "It's not often a son-in-law is like that. He's always pressing me to live with them altogether."

Sir Peter might be willing to take in his mother-in-law as a permanent guest, but it seemed that at present, while she was living on her own, he did not do much for her—perhaps she was too proud to accept help. I noticed some rather clever little economies that I do not think were due to parsimony—Mrs. Foyle was a very different character from her "connection" Mr. Waterfield. She really practised quite an elegant economy. For instance, we all know that it is keeping up appearances that is ruinous. Even if Mr. Shukry is of the party, anyone can afford to have as many cakes as people will eat—it is the appearance of plenty that is the trouble. Mrs. Foyle bought cakes—not Monday's leftovers—but excellent small cakes, fresh from the best shop in Christminster. They were often in the form of long fingers, and she could cut them in two. I suspect that in some other way she was equally clever over the cigarettes, which only Cheeseman accepted: "They're all mixed up together," I heard her say.

While old Waterfield, in his library, had some visible signs of wealth, Mrs. Foyle's assets were all invisible. But we had still no direct evidence about the means of either of them.

Stephen, whose thoughts often followed the same track as mine, now asked her if she knew Mr. Waterfield at all.

Mrs. Foyle's gray-green eyes goggled more fishily than ever on either side of her scaly nose. "Oh, my Lord!" she said. "That wicked old man! You've never

been to tea with him?" And she gave a little scream of laughter.

"Well, it's a good thing there are *two* of you," she said wickedly. "Oh, my Lord, I wouldn't advise one young man to go alone!"

Mr. Shukry sniggered.

"Oh, I think he's a very good old man," I protested. "He seems rather pious."

"They're always the worst," said Mrs. Foyle. "There's an extraordinary old fellow living near Kell-lych. . . ."

On our way home we found Mr. Waterfield putting away his bicycle in the shed in the front garden.

"I have just returned from a day of most profitable research," he said. "My studies are in a very good case at present, I am sure you will be glad to hear. I contemplate a short break."

We said that would be very nice, and asked him what he would do with it.

"I intend a small pilgrimage," he said. "I mean to visit Colchester to pay a tribute to the memory of those gallant Royalist officers brutally shot there by Fairfax on the bowling green. I may visit other places in the eastern counties, of historical or ecclesiological interest."

"Ely?" I suggested, feeling a little uncertain of my geography.

"I despise the decaying town of Ely, and its Romanesque cathedral," said Mr. Waterfield, gesturing with his bicycle pump. "I require the soaring elevation of

the Gothic arch to stir my devotion. There is nothing heavenward-pointing about the round arches of Ely: they bind one down to earth."

I checked an impulse to apologize for the architecture of Ely: Mr. Waterfield was so severe that I might have been responsible for it.

He turned to Stephen: "Perhaps you would care to be my companion on this bicycle tour?" he said. "Naturally each of us would pay his own expenses. But I daresay it would not appeal to you. I do not suggest taking your brother from his books."

"I could not leave my piano," said Stephen, with the utmost gravity.

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Waterfield slowly. He turned a little, so as to include me in his new offer: "I will send you a card, if there is anything of interest to report to you. I shall ask you, in my absence, to keep an eye upon my gardener, the mild Mr. Telfer. In return, garden produce shall in these days be yours," he ended grandiloquently.

Mrs. Preston had often observed that Mr. Waterfield's neglected lawn was littered with excellent cooking apples that the mild Mr. Telfer allowed to lie until they were rotten. I looked forward to letting her collect several baskets full during the next few days.

"So you have been visiting next door?" went on Mr. Waterfield. "I have seen a young oriental frequently emerge from that house, but I suppose he may be a lodger. I am willing to believe that Lady Elliot's mother is a clean-living woman. I daresay she is too old for anything else," he chuckled mirthlessly.

"You can't really help it, sir, it's to be expected," was Mrs. Preston's charitable comment when she found that we were getting to know our neighbors. "But I often say the neighborhood's gone down, sir, really, since Mrs. Tanqueray's mother lived here."

Mrs. Tanqueray was a former employer of Mrs. Preston's: her husband had been Dean of St. Mark's (so Mrs. Preston said). Stephen and I privately believed her to have been own sister to Mrs. Harris. I suppose we could have settled the matter one way or the other by looking up the late Tanqueray in some book of reference—but we enjoyed the state of uncertainty. Perhaps we cherished our scepticism about Mrs. Tanqueray as a child cherishes his belief in Father Christmas, and we did not want it to be shattered.

"Mr. Walter, sir, told me," (this was young Mr. Tanqueray) "that Mr. Waterfield once did some coaching at the college in his father's time."

Stephen and I were silent, in willing suspension of disbelief.

"The young gentlemen," it appeared, had not liked Mr. Waterfield very much—so little that one day he had been found in a crucified posture on the lawn, his legs and arms clamped down by croquet hoops. They had left him like that all night. Hence, we conjectured, his aversion to round arches, and his feeling that they bound one down to the earth. He seemed to have had nearly as sad a life as poor Mrs. Foyle.

"Whatever did they do that for?" asked Stephen.

"Well, sir, there was some reason," said Mrs. Preston gravely. "Mr. Walter didn't quite like to say."

We were at liberty to form the darkest conjectures, or to believe that Mrs. Preston had not thought of what Mr. Walter was to say.

Stephen put to her Mr. Waterfield's query about Mrs. Foyle, though Walter Tanqueray was perhaps unlikely to have any light to throw here.

She replied most satisfactorily, and on her own authority.

"It's quite true, poor Mrs. Foyle, she hasn't a hair on her whole body, sir."

"Then why has she chosen such an extraordinarily ugly wig?" asked Stephen. "Are you quite sure those curls aren't real?"

"They all take off, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "She's as bald as the back of your hand, sir. Those days I worked for her, for the wedding, she told me a thing or two. Besides, I've seen her without her hair on."

"It must be a dreadful sight," we said, shuddering.

"Not very advertising, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "She said to me once: 'I lost every hair on my body when my husband left me.' 'Well,' I said to Mr. Preston afterwards, 'he wasn't much loss. Nothing to lose one's hair for, one might say.'"

"I didn't know Captain Foyle had left her," said Stephen. "Of course we know he was torpedoed in the war."

"*He* wasn't torpedoed," said Mrs. Preston with a grim smile. "He died in 1926, after his daughter's marriage."

The figure in the three-cornered hat, standing on the bridge and going down with a curse, had to be

erased from our mythology. But I was almost consoled by the substitute—the seedy naval man, with a hook, creeping along the hedgerows of Somerset, making his way one evening to Kellynch Hall, and inquiring for my lady. In her bedroom Miranda Elliot twisted her pearl necklace in agitation; though everyone said she held her head so proudly, yet her life was poisoned by this secret. . . . Life is more amusing if one has read plenty of novels.

“We know where he’s buried, sir,” said Mrs. Preston darkly. I started, wondering for a moment if Miranda had taken a leaf out of Lady Audley’s book. But no. “He’s buried at Chislehurst,” Mrs. Preston continued. “He was living with another woman, sir; and Mrs. Foyle felt that very much.”

I mentally took away the bottle of rum with which I had endowed the late Captain Foyle and gave him a bottle of ink instead, and a shrill and blowsy woman for a companion. She stood menacingly over him while he sat at a table in their suburban lodgings; there was no more fight in him—meekly at her dictation he wrote blackmailing letters on cheap, lined paper to Kellynch, with the hand that had once thrown knives at Mrs. Foyle. Perhaps the Elliots had spent so much in buying him off that they could not now afford to do much for his widow, infinitely more deserving though she was. I remembered that the family diamonds were entailed.

5

It would have been too much to expect that Cheeseman should refrain from following up our acquaintance, particularly as he often traveled into town with me on the number two bus, and occasionally dabbled about with books and periodicals in the library. One afternoon, instead of returning to our own toast and tea, we had unavoidably to go to see him and his mother.

It is scarcely self-praise to say that we were obviously a great addition to the *Salon* Cheeseman that day. We found there a Quaker lady, Miss Poole—presumably a pacifist, but apparently not an intellectual; a young American poet, possibly with some intellectual pretensions, but not, probably, a pacifist; and an ineffectual elderly man called Shrubsole, who claimed to be both intellectual and pacifist, though his claims seemed to be ill-founded. Cheeseman may have hoped that we should help to bind these different ingredients together, like the egg in a pudding.

Miss Poole might be agreeable, but it was old Mrs. Cheeseman who struck us as the nicest person there. Unfortunately her son did not want us to have anything to do with her—I suppose because she was ex-

tremely common, and for some reason or other he was trying to impress us. He disguised this feeling under a show of anxiety for her and was continually urging her to go away and rest.

"I rested an hour before lunch, Stanley," she said, "and I've just had my afternoon nap. I'll stay and talk to these boys; you say they're Mrs. Foyle's friends?"

We said, guardedly, that she was our next-door neighbor.

"I wish she'd come and see me sometimes," said Mrs. Cheeseman. "I think she's an awfully sweet lady. But she thinks of no one but that hussy of a daughter of hers."

"You don't like her daughter?" one of us asked.

"That Miranda? No!" said Mrs. Cheeseman. "She's a hard, stuck-up, selfish piece. Mrs. Foyle thinks the world of her—worked her fingers to the bone for her too. And a lot of thanks she gets for it. My lady's too grand to see much of her now."

"Mother, you're tiring yourself," said Cheeseman, tearing himself away from the American poet. "I think you ought to go and lie down."

"I see you want to get rid of me, Stanley," said Mrs. Cheeseman.

"Of course not, Mother," said Cheeseman with resignation. "If you're going to stay, do at least put your feet up." Perhaps he did not like being addressed as Stanley; I remembered Mrs. Foyle always called him George—and he always wrote under that name.

Miss Poole had just detected Shrubsole in a heresy—

"That's arrant *Genevafism*," we heard her say crushingly.

"I had me feet up from ten till ten last night," said Mrs. Cheeseman slowly. "I had them up again from twelve to one, then I had forty winks after lunch—and you know I always put me feet up from six to seven-thirty. Now I think I'll put them down for a little."

"I suppose Miranda Foyle is a good actress?" I asked.

"She's awful!" said Mrs. Cheeseman. "I'm sure no management would ever employ her if Sir Peter didn't insist on it. He's really good—and people would put up with a lot to get him. But the audience won't always stand her—she gets catcalls sometimes in the provinces. I hope she gets rotten eggs one day."

"Why does her husband insist on her acting, then?" asked Stephen.

"She's mad about it," said Mrs. Cheeseman. "Always was, even as a girl. And she can make him do just what she likes—she's a very odd woman in some ways, in the power she has over some people—her mother among them. Perhaps she gets it from her father."

Another vision of the pirate captain flashed before my mind's eye. He stood glaring with his dark, gypsy eyes—the glint of a gold earring showed on one side under his thick black hair and his slouched down hat. Poor Mrs. Foyle, hypnotized, clung with her fingers to the table. He swung his hook into the air . . . I have never completed the visualization of that scene, for before the end I always feel a little sick.

"I remember Miranda giving dramatic recitals in the drawing room, when we lodged with her mother,"

said Mrs. Cheeseman with a chuckle. "My word—I can't tell you how relieved I was when we were able to leave them, and get into this house! Stan has rather a weakness for Miranda—she can get round men. I dare say you boys would think her very fascinating, if you ever met her. But you won't hear any woman speak well of her in a hurry—except her mother."

"Now, Mother, I can see you look tired," said Cheeseman.

"I can see you want to get rid of me, Stan," said the old woman good-naturedly, and submitted to being led from the room.

Miss Poole looked rather intolerant of all this gossip. Shrubsole and the poet also looked a little superior—but they became more attentive when Cheeseman was the speaker, and when Miranda rather than her mother occupied the center of the narrative. They might, after all, pick up a piece of information that they could repeat elsewhere with effect. But neither the theater nor Kellynch meant anything to Miss Poole.

"My mother's awfully down on Miranda," said Cheeseman. "You mustn't listen to her. As a schoolgirl, Miranda tormented mother's favorite cat—and she's never been forgiven for it."

"I should think not!" said Miss Poole sharply—and we warmly sympathized.

"Dear Miss Poole, I forgot you were on the R.S.P.C.A.," said Cheeseman with a smile. "But it wasn't as bad as all that!

"Miranda's such a *loyal* friend," he continued emotionally. "And I've never known anyone more utterly

unspoilt, when you think of everything that's come to her."

"You still keep up with her?" asked Shrubsole with respect.

"I try to get down to Kellynch for a few days every summer," said Cheeseman, in the tone of one exhausted by an agreeable exertion. "It's such a lovely spot—and she has the knack of getting an interesting crowd round her. There's a good atmosphere; everyone's very jolly." He spoke with a good deal of unction.

"Mrs. Foyle seems to enjoy it," I said.

"Poor Mrs. Foyle, she *is* rather pathetic!" said Cheeseman. "Of course it isn't her world, and she doesn't fit in there at all. She keeps following Miranda with her eyes, and she would run after her all the time if she dared. If Miranda wasn't an absolute *angel*, she'd be really rude to her sometimes—its almost unendurable for her. Peter detests Mrs. Foyle and makes no secret of it. Then there are all the little, tactless, vulgar things she does—gossiping with the servants, and so forth. Very unpleasant for Miranda. And you know, she's always hoping Miranda will have a child—asks pointed questions about her health in front of her guests. And once she brought down some horrible little pamphlets about cures for sterility and left them about on sofas in the drawing room. I suppose she hadn't the courage, when the time came, to force them on Peter and Miranda. Then she often remarks pointedly that she didn't have a child herself till she had been married fifteen years—so there is hope for everyone."

The American poet guffawed, and Shrubsole tittered. Miss Poole's spectacles glinted with annoyance; she seemed to be one of those people who have a great love for Mankind in general, but little interest in the individual.

"We seem to talk about nothing but Lady Elliot today," she said reproachfully.

I did not feel at all self-reproachful, seeing no good reason why we should rather choose to talk of anything else. On no subject about which Stephen and I were curious, was Cheeseman so well qualified to gratify our curiosity.

"But while we are on the subject," I persisted in asking him, "what is she like on the stage?"

"She's exquisite," he said. "Perhaps she ought really only to appear in small theaters, or at private performances. There's something so fine, so intimate about her acting, that it doesn't always make its full effect on the stage. You might even be disappointed the first time you heard her. But if she reads poetry, it is quite wonderful." He shut his eyes for a second as if in raptured recollection.

"How nice!" said Miss Poole, unexpectedly—so she was a person of culture.

"Of course she is supremely intelligent," he went on, "and an artist to her finger tips."

So she had finger tips, I noted . . . and the point was evidently not lost on Stephen.

"She's quite—normal?" I asked delicately. "She hasn't poor Mrs. Foyle's dreadful deformity?"

"Oh, no," said Cheeseman. "Miranda has exquisite

hands. And it's never known if poor Mrs. Foyle's deformity was due to an accident or not."

Stephen looked at me. "But it's wonderful what she can do with her hands," he said to Cheeseman. "She's very clever."

"Poor little thing!" he said, but with a smile that was not very kind. "It's really rather pathetic. At Kellynch she was knitting away furiously with her little stumps, making some sort of wrap for Miranda to wear as a protection against the drafts in the theater. It was of the most appalling maroon color."

Shrubsole tittered, and the American guffawed. Miss Poole's attention was evidently very far away. I felt a sudden pang of pity, and rather wished for old Mrs. Cheeseman's presence—for she had talked of Mrs. Foyle "working her fingers to the bone."

Cheeseman went on: "I shall never forget the day Mrs. Foyle left, this year. I happened to be there. Miranda was extremely happy—she stood on the terrace breathing deeply, as if she'd just come out of a stuffy room. Then she took me for a turn in the grounds—looking round the place as if it was all new and fresh, now her mother had gone. No more fear of the poor little person coming padding after her. Of course she wouldn't show her relief to other people, she's far too loyal—but I'm such an old friend. Well, we went into the summer house to sit down. It's a sort of eighteenth-century gazebo, with an enchanting view. Suddenly Miranda gave a scream—she'd sat down on Mrs. Foyle's knitting, that had somehow got left behind there. Usually she's very controlled—never gives her-

self away. But she picked it up and shrieked. 'Ugh! I don't know how I can touch anything she's handled with those revolting stumps!' She ran out and threw it on a bonfire the gardeners were making. She's very sensitive."

Stephen put a hand to his eyes.

"The joke is," said Cheeseman, "that Miranda got a letter next day from Christminster begging her to forward the knitting, which Mrs. Foyle was anxious to finish. She had to say that it couldn't be found anywhere."

I could almost have wished for Mr. Shukry there, to say: "That is not very funny." But he might only have contributed an ugly shout of eastern mirth, to match the poet's Middle Western guffaw.

"Poor Mrs. Foyle!" I said, walking home with Stephen. "It's almost made me cry."

"It made me cry," said Stephen.

And as if to show what folly it had been to wish for Mr. Shukry, there he was on our doorstep when we got home: he had come to call on us. If we had only been a minute later we should have missed him.

"I think I may come in," he said, with a smile.

We did not know any answer to that, but to allow him.

"Well, my dear, how do you enjoy your times?" he said to Stephen.

Stephen, I could see, was so frozen with horror at the notion of being dear to Mr. Shukry, that no reply was to be expected from him.

"We've just been out to tea," I said vaguely—ushering him in, offering him a chair, and apologizing for having no cigarettes.

"It does not matter," he said. "I don't begin to fume yet."

Stephen now thawed sufficiently to say he thought we had some sherry.

"I would like whisky," said Mr. Shukry.

We had to answer that there wasn't any.

"Why do you not have whisky?" he said. "It is much better."

"I come to see you," continued Mr. Shukry, nevertheless accepting a glass of sherry, "because I think as you are two young men living alone, you must surely know some dames. Often I wish I was at the cinema or in a dance place with some dames. But instead I have to sit in my flap chair and whistle."

"That must be very trying for the other people in the house," observed Stephen.

"I have to know *very* much dames," said Mr. Shukry.

In answer to this cry from the heart, I answered, with deliberate stupidity, that he knew Mrs. Foyle, who was a very nice woman.

"She is too old, sir," said Mr. Shukry simply. "She is not for the sex pleasure."

Stephen remarked acidly that Mrs. Foyle could probably put him in the way of making friends better than we could.

"Mrs. Foyle tell me she will bring me to a barty," admitted Mr. Shukry. "But I think she have too little

money to make barties. She needs all her money to send to her girl."

We were struck aback by this.

"I don't think that can be possible," I said. "Mrs. Foyle's daughter is married to a very rich man—she can't be in want of money."

"Perhaps her husband doesn't give her enough money," said Mr. Shukry, managing his *p*-sounds for once. But he quickly relapsed again: "He is a public man, and he needs too much money. The servant tell me Mrs. Foyle says: 'I must save money for my girl.'"

"Poor thing!" said Stephen. "I suppose she wants to have something to leave her daughter at her death."

"I think it is now," said Mr. Shukry, but he clearly was not interested. Stephen and I might be enthralled at this notion of a pelican daughter, but Mr. Shukry's interest in Miranda was much more banal and boring.

"I want to know Mrs. Foyle's girl," he said. "I think if she is at the theater, she must be a naughty lady. I hope if she likes Iraqi mens."

We had to endure a good many more of Mr. Shukry's speculations while he drank a second glass of sherry, and they were all on the same lines. In me they produced that kind of tedium which, like influenza, gives one a physical pain in the back and neck, and, like grief, tugs at the larynx until it is very hard not to cry out. I suppose Stephen must have felt similar sensations, and I am afraid it was selfish of me to seek the moment's relief offered by a ring at the doorbell.

Mr. Waterfield stood on the threshold.

"I come to bid you and your brother farewell, before

starting on my travels," he said. "But I hear voices. Am I intruding upon you?"

"No, please come in," I said, for he could make things no worse. "We have only the foreign student from next door."

"The colored gentleman?" said Mr. Waterfield in a carrying voice. "Then I will ask you to excuse me. I do not care to associate with niggers. I will withdraw."

I returned to find Mr. Shukry in a state of considerable dudgeon; he must have overheard everything. He showed his feelings by an angry silence and the refusal of a third glass of sherry. His eyes roamed uneasily, revealing a great deal of the white. Stephen and I, dreading nothing so much as a return to his former volubility, were only too glad to sit still without speaking. I stifled a charitable impulse to apologize for Mr. Waterfield's rather old-fashioned views on the color bar (and Mr. Shukry's pleasant shade of weak *café au lait* was a fairer and more wholesome complexion than his own yellow). I felt it would call for a torrent of eloquence which we could not bear to listen to. Stephen would very properly despise me for my weakness. Besides, Mr. Waterfield was quite old enough to answer for himself.

Stephen stirred the fire with the poker and muttered to me in German that he had had as much of our visitor's company as he could stand.

At last Mr. Shukry shook hands with us and made a somewhat injured retreat.

"Ah!" sighed Stephen, in a voice in which pain was still stronger than relief. He stretched out his weary

length towards the fire. He was taller than me, and had three inches more to be bored by Mr. Shukry.

I felt penitent for having snatched the moment's respite that Mr. Waterfield's visit afforded.

"Sit still," I said. "I'll get supper ready."

When we had recovered a little, we began to consider the new and surprising light that had been thrown on Mrs. Foyle by Shukry. Had we really got for our neighbor a sort of Queen Lear or Mère Goriot?

"I can't *quite* believe it," said Stephen with regret. "You see, both Lear and Goriot were rich once. But I don't see how poor Mrs. Foyle could ever have had anything to give away."

"There are people who would rob children of a half-penny," I said, "or a blind man of the money in his tin can."

Stephen was cheered by this helpful argument. "All the same, I don't quite see it in this case," he said.

I remarked that Lear and Goriot always appeared to have been the unique parents of their daughters—as Zeus was of Pallas Athene. But in this case we knew that Miranda had had another parent, as well as her mother.

"I'm *devoted* to Captain Foyle," said Stephen. He had become as dear to us as the bad characters in fairy stories often are to children.

Perhaps he really was a bogey man, I reflected, looking into the fire—an incubus, a sort of demon-lover. We had never met anyone who had known him and this hypothesis would explain a lot of things—though not, perhaps, his burial at Chislehurst. In view of this

fact, I decided that it was not really worth proposing my theory to Stephen.

"I want to hear some Hadyn Quartets," said Stephen. "If you don't want to listen, I'll take the gramophone to my room."

"Don't," I said, "I should like it."

Half an hour later the doorbell cut rudely through the delicate music—music that could hardly be audible to anyone outside on the stairs.

At all events we decided to assume that we were unheard.

The bell rang again.

"We will be kind to ourselves," said Stephen. "I can't endure another visitation."

And he changed the gramophone record as footsteps were heard descending the stairs.

6

AT tea at the Shrubsoles' we found Cyprian's sister-in-law, to whom it 'was impossible not to feel well-disposed, as she seemed so pleased to see us.

"*My dears*, at last I see you!" she exclaimed. "Tommy will be so pleased too."

Thomas Tucker was not much like his brother Cyprian, except in indeterminateness about what he wanted to do or be—though the alternatives before him were other than those before Cyprian. There was a perpetual struggle going on between his name and his nature. "Tommy Tucker" should have been one of those odious, breezy, noisy clergymen who are always known by their Christian names—and he sometimes had hopes of approximating to this type. But he was much better fitted by nature to model himself upon a more old-fashioned style of cleric. He should have followed his brother's example, and have assumed the name of some other father of the church—Gregory, perhaps, or Basil.

"Well, old chap," he said to me, "how goes the *research*?"

I said something vague and deprecatory. People do not really want to hear about one's work; why should they?

Tucker on the contrary, and I was not in the least surprised, wanted to talk about his own. He felt the need, he said, for study—it ought to form an integral part of a priest's life. Could I tell him how he could get admittance to the university library? I knew, of course that he came from Another Place—ha! ha! (I concluded that he had studied at Oxford or Cambridge and was bound by no academic ties to Christminster.)

“Sometimes one afternoon I might see an hour and a half that I could *seize*,” he said wistfully, “and then I would *dash* to the library. Or at midday, if I just allowed myself time to *snatch* a bun. . . .”

“You'd better get your vicar to recommend you,” I said.

He brightened. “I *do* believe the Vicar would vouch for my respectability, honesty and ability to handle (as I have done for years) the most precious books. . . .”

“I hear you met Mr. Shrubsole at George Cheeseman's,” Mary was saying to Stephen. “I'm told one meets the most *thrilling* people there.”

Stephen went on to say that we had met Cheeseman at Mrs. Foyle's, and I could see that he was preparing the way for further questions about her and Miranda.

No doubt it was the fatal name of Miranda Foyle, so dinned in her ears the last time we met, that made Miss Poole ask our host if we might not at once proceed to business. For we were not merely a tea party. I think we constituted some sort of drawing-room meeting.

At this time there was a civil war in Spain. I do not now recollect what they fought each other for, but the

curious can probably look it up in some book of reference. North Christminster, where people are public-spirited and charitable, was going to organize a bazaar and a dance, in order to send medical supplies. Shrubsole was one of the moving spirits, and he had got us together to see what we could or would do.

Miss Poole's main concern was that no alcoholic drink should be served at the dance.

"They are supposed to come to help Spain," she said indignantly. "Not to drink."

Someone suggested that people would come to amuse themselves as well. If they only wanted to help Spain, they could stay at home and send a donation. Refreshments would be expected. Besides, we ought to make some money by the bar takings.

"Tea is more refreshing than anything," said Miss Poole firmly. "People only get the hotter for all their beers."

And then worse differences threatened. Some of our number wished to send their supplies to one side only, and they would like to send arms too, if they could. Their eyes glared with hatred of the other side. They had drawn up petitions to the Government, which they wanted us all to sign, and they were staging demonstrations, in which they wanted us all to take part.

Miss Poole, ourselves, and one or two others, were absolutely clear about our position: we would help nobody to take life, we would help anybody to save life. We would make no compromise whatever, and if the meeting intended to commit itself to any other course, we were perfectly willing to walk out of it.

"I really don't see all that much difference between the two sides," said Miss Poole firmly. "I dislike both of them intensely."

"Blasphemy!" cried Tucker—and, as a clergyman, he really ought to have known better what blasphemy was—but it is a fine-sounding word, and one understands the temptation to overuse it.

Shrubsole, evidently quite unclear what he himself thought or felt, tried rather ineffectually to make peace.

Tucker, unmollified, began to talk about the Good Samaritan, choosing to forget that all we know of him is that he carried medical supplies. "Do you really think," he asked, combining the different sorts of pugnacity appropriate to the two styles of cleric that he represented, "do you really think that if he had come sooner, he would not have given the thieves a good thrashing?"

"He is a fictitious character," I said. "It's false criticism to ask what he would have done before he came on the scene—he didn't exist before he came on the scene."

There was a cry of protest from Mary, which too late she hurriedly tried to cover up. I conjecture that she had first thought that I was throwing doubt on Holy Writ—which as a clergyman's wife she ought to defend. Then she had thought out for herself that I was quite right, and that the Samaritan figured in a parable and not a miracle.

Then a person whom Shrubsole had invited to represent the working class began to talk. He was in appear-

ance and manner a dumb ox, and he could not talk very fast or clearly.

"Well, I suppose we're all Christians here—well, I'm a Christian myself, or trying to be one"—he blushed, and made a long pause. "Well, yer see, it's all Love"—he paused and hung his head. "It seems to me Christianity is just Love."

Everyone looked at the carpet, in acute embarrassment.

"So that's the message I'm trying to convey," said the dumb ox, in a surprising spurt of articulateness. "Well, what Jesus said is . . ." his muttering now became almost inaudible. "Well, what I'm trying to tell you is, we all ought to love each other. We're all one family, yer know—now that's a beautiful thought."

"I don't find it at all a beautiful thought," said Stephen. "The human race is always having family quarrels."

The author we most admire has rightly said that people do not know about families, but Stephen and I know. It is one of the ways in which we are unlike people.

It was quite a relief when Thomas Tucker began to speak again. The clergy are at least trained to talk about Christianity in public, and the laity are inured to hearing them do so without embarrassment, and indeed without paying them very much attention.

"Christianity may be very many different things; it may be that—someone slaps you on the face like *that!*"

He executed the action with too much vigor—his

pince-nez flew across the room, and were retrieved by Stephen.

"(Oh dear, thank you so much; I am so glad they are not broken. I am quite helpless without them, and they are my only pair)," he said. "And you—and you turn the other cheek."

"It's the only thing I know as Christianity," said Miss Poole uncompromisingly.

"And yet a righteous cause may hang round one, like a millstone of responsibility," said Tucker. "I am convinced, if I were a Spaniard, that I should support the Government against the rebels to the last ounce of my being."

At this stage it was revealed to us by someone, who had only been waiting for her chance to speak, that any funds we raised were destined to an organization which was entirely unpolitical and neutral, and which gave medical aid impartially to either side. All our disputes had therefore been quite in the air.

Others may have been sorry, but Miss Poole at least was delighted to come down to earth again. "We must sandwich for ourselves," she said with enthusiasm.

Everyone looked a little puzzled.

"I don't see why we should waste money to pay sandwich men sixpence an hour," she added. "Hired sandwich men never keep moving, as they ought to, if all the town's to see them. They always seem to stand about near a public house or a tea stall."

It must indeed be dry work, impersonating a sandwich, and one can understand that a natural association of ideas should make those who do it wish fre-

quently to wash themselves down, as it were, with a cup of tea, or a glass of beer.

"I don't mind sandwiching at all," said Miss Poole. "I like it. One gets to hear so many different points of view. I sandwiched last year for the Abyssinians."

"Well, let us collect volunteers," said Shrubsole briskly.

Miss Poole turned on me and said witheringly, "Have you ever sandwiched, for *any* cause?"

I said humbly that I was quite willing to start now. Stephen and I were therefore put on the sandwich list, as he also made no objection. We were further requested to collect unwanted objects of our own or of our neighbors' that might be sold at a rummage stall at the bazaar.

Stephen said that we did not know anyone except Mrs. Foyle and Mr. Waterfield, but we would try them.

And now Miss Poole surprised us by being quite communicative about Mrs. Foyle.

"I never have really known whether she is with us or against us," she said. "When we had objectors here in prison in the war, she used to bring them hot-water bottles, and soup in thermos flasks, and all sorts of things. And yet I don't think she had the least sympathy with the movement. Her daughter was a schoolgirl then, and she was quite keen—Mrs. Foyle never interfered. She let her distribute quite a lot of forbidden literature—and I suppose she herself would have been held responsible if it had been found. I remember the girl had some of our tracts in her satchel once, and it burst open on a windy day and they flew about all

over Barnicot Square. Mrs. Foyle was quite funny describing how respectable old dons ran about picking them up, and bringing them back to Miranda. If they had known what they were, they would have dropped them like red-hot coals."

Miss Poole spoke with a dark satisfaction. Even a respectable Quaker lady can get a thrill from breaking the law.

I happened to encounter Mr. Waterfield in the library, before going to call on him in the interests of Spain.

"Old Waterfield reads nothing but Phi books now," one of the assistants told me. "I hope he's not preparing for a lascivious old age."

This little joke of Dr. Byron's needs explanation: he had attached the Greek letter Phi as a pressmark to the locked cupboards containing books deemed to be pornographical, obscene or curious.

And as I passed old Waterfield's desk he held up a volume of Havelock Ellis with an air of triumph. "This is a Phi book; it has to be unlocked by a senior member of the staff. The key of the cupboard is not entrusted to the brats who run about and disturb our studies. I presume some care of their morals is intended; their manners could hardly be further corrupted.

"Unnatural vice," said Mr. Waterfield in a carrying voice. "Now that is a subject you have probably heard nothing about. You were not born when Oscar Wilde was convicted—under a vile law, a disgrace to

our system. I am convinced it is a thing that has been more prevalent at all times than we have any idea of. This writer suggests many interesting ideas which need following up. I am going to read every book I can find upon the subject, for I believe it will revolutionize my views upon history. For instance, I had formerly been inclined to accept Shakespeare's estimate of the character of Joan of Arc. It is now my firm belief that she was a Lesbian."

"That is a very remarkable theory," I said.

"It seems to me epoch-making," said old Waterfield. "I mean to devote what life remains to me to studies of this sort."

This I related to my friend the assistant.

"Time the old wretch was looking after his soul," he said sourly. Perhaps it was he who had the bother of unlocking the books Mr. Waterfield needed for his curious studies.

And when I later offered Mr. Waterfield the opportunity of contributing to works of mercy which might have benefited his immortal part, he was not at first enthusiastic.

"I am an ardent Carlist," he said. "Otherwise I am indifferent to Spanish politics."

So, we told him, was the organization which we represented; its aim was only to relieve suffering wherever it found it.

"I am not sure how much I wish to relieve suffering in Spain," said Mr. Waterfield in a thoughtful tone. "I am not sure that it would altogether be a good thing. The Spaniards are a very cruel people. It may do them

good to suffer a little. Their bullfights are a disgrace to humanity. I disapprove most strongly of the torture of innocent animals—as you know, I am vegetarian in my habits.”

We suggested gently that some innocent people were likely to be suffering in Spain.

“Perhaps you may be right,” he said, in an effort to be perfectly fair. “I understand the red hooligans have been ravishing enclosed nuns—it makes my blood boil. I have not heard that they have ravished monks—and such things are often kept out of our newspapers. But I prefer to think it is not very probable. I understand from my reading that the vice which Havelock Ellis defends, and which Oscar Wilde was convicted of, is not very common among Latin peoples. Though I do not know why it should be so.

“Poverty,” added Mr. Waterfield, “has long ago induced me to part with many treasures—I do not regret being a pauper, for I remember the cause. But sentiment has made me preserve a small brooch of my grandmother’s—my grandmother Waterfield, she who was a Musgrove. It was given to her by her aunt, Lady Wentworth, the Admiral’s wife. I think I will give it to you for your sale; I have no one coming after me who would value it.”

This generosity in itself earned an invitation, and we had already more or less decided to invite Mr. Waterfield to after-dinner coffee—it would take up less time than tea, and one’s vitality is not quite so low after dinner as at four o’clock. We meant, whether he liked it or not, to entertain him with the gramophone.

Stephen had also the happy thought of inviting Mrs. Foyle at the same time, to kill two birds with one stone.

In view of his previous remarks, I felt it only proper to ask if he objected to meeting her.

"Our connection by marriage is so remote that it need not have been alluded to," said Mr. Waterfield. "But I have learned that she has no fingers. That is a deformity I am very susceptible to. I do not think I could bear to be in the same room with her—my nerves would be so powerfully affected."

"Then we will ask her some other day," I said hastily.

"So you've come to collect for Spain, for Miss Poole's organization?" said Mrs. Foyle. "I *do* like Miss Poole, she's so genuine. Not that I'm much in love with her organization, nor with Spain, for that matter. Peter and Miranda said it was so filthy when they went there for a holiday. Lice! And everything cooked in rancid oil. But I'll certainly look and see what I can find for your bazaar."

This was handsome. We offered to call when she pleased, to fetch her contribution.

"Oh, no—I'll come myself and bring it; I want to see the inside of your flat," said Mrs. Foyle, with open curiosity.

Stephen at once issued an invitation to tea—since Waterfield was coming to coffee.

"Oh, no, don't let's fix anything," said Mrs. Foyle exasperatingly. "I'll just pop in at any time."

"You might find us out," I said.

"And when we're in, we don't always answer the

bell," said Stephen candidly. "You see, you might be Shukry, who bores us terribly—and we shouldn't know."

"Oh, my Lord, don't I know!" said Mrs. Foyle. Her eyes glinted. "We'll have a signal," she said. "I'll give three rings."

She seemed delighted. I conjectured that she hadn't been in a secret with anyone for years—and there is no surer way of obliterating loneliness, at all events for the moment. Our complicity with Mrs. Foyle began from then—and as Charity, in our opinion, begins at home, Stephen and I were often glad to think that our efforts had done more good in Christminster than in Spain. On the other hand, Charity abroad is apt to cost one far less in the long run, in time and trouble—the Charity that begins at home is apt to go on at home, making small demands indeed, but continually making them.

Spain, however, had one more demand to make on us, that we should sandwich for her sake. We met the other volunteers at a dissenting church hall on a wet afternoon. The human filling, appearing to itself very meager, was stuffed into the large ungainly sandwiches. Stephen was placed at one end of the procession, I at the other—all the intervening sandwich men were women. Some undergraduates had offered their services, but Miss Poole had not liked to accept them in case the proctors disapproved.

If I were a proctor, I thought, I should very much approve of sandwiching as an exercise for the young.

It is a sport that permits one to make oneself extremely conspicuous, while severely limiting the mischief into which one can get—surely no one could run very fast or recklessly in the slippery paths of youth if he were impeded by the carapace of a couple of sandwich boards. And what a cure for exhibitionism and self-consciousness alike, to be got up in a manner expressly calculated to attract attention, and to find that one is attracting very little attention indeed.

We walked solemnly up the side of a long cinema queue that was waiting patiently in the rain: two shop-girls tittered, but most of the people ignored us, even though they had nothing else to look at.

“Shall we go back once more, all along the queue?” I asked.

“It was horrible,” said the woman next to me, with a shudder. “But we *ought* to.”

“People like you are doing a lot of harm,” said an indignant old lady, struggling with her umbrella at a bus stop. “You want to mess us up with the affairs of foreigners, and what all, until I don’t know where it will end.”

“I am glad you think we are doing anything at all,” I said drearily, as the brim of my hat discharged its stored-up waters down my neck. “Myself, I hadn’t that impression.”

Two rude young men addressed Stephen. “Hold your head up when you talk to us—we want to have a look at you—to see what you’re like. Yes, I thought as much. Well, this is a very foolish game of yours, you know—”

Stephen, so far as I could hear, was monosyllabic in his replies. We halted, because it was always possible that thus our boards might attract more attention. Already the ink was running, and the legend on some of them was barely readable.

"You have been talking to two officers," said one of the two young oafs smartly, turning on his heel.

"It does not embarrass me in the least," said Stephen distinctly.

Damp and depressed, we marched back to the place from which we had set out. I helped Stephen off with his sandwich boards, now a pulpy mess.

"Rain, rain, go to Spain!" he said vindictively.

Mrs. Preston probably did much more for Spain than any of us. Her remarkable powers of organization and of work are well known in Christminster—at all events Miss Poole was too intelligent and too well informed to be ignorant of them. She came round one morning and rang our bell until she obtained admittance, though in one room Stephen was playing a Beethoven sonata, and Mrs. Preston was filling another room with the high, mournful song of the carpet sweeper.

“Miss Poole, sir, has asked me to do the buffy teas at her fete,” she told Stephen. And spelling the word mentally to himself, he saw what she meant.

“I want a good reliable woman with me for the buffy teas,” she said. “A lady, if possible, would be a great help. Once I had Mrs. Tanqueray with me to do the buffy teas at a fete. It would be a great help if Mrs. Tanqueray was to be there.”

Stephen and I would have been prepared to bet any money that Mrs. Tanqueray would not come, though Mrs. Preston at times professed to entertain hopes of it.

“She wouldn’t commit herself definitely,” she owned. “‘No, Mrs. Preston,’ she said. ‘I can’t bear having to break a promise, so I won’t commit.’”

We admired this gallant attempt at verisimilitude.

"If she can't come, you might like to ask Mrs. Foyle," I suggested.

"How stupid you are!" said Stephen. "Her hands!"

"Well, I don't know, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "I fancy Mrs. Foyle could wield a teapot well enough. But it wouldn't be like having Mrs. Tanqueray, sir. Mrs. Tanqueray is a perfect lady, in every shape and form."

And when we made inquiries, after the day, we were told that Mrs. Tanqueray had been prevented from coming. It had been a great disappointment to her.

"And to you too, I'm sure," said Stephen sympathetically, but not quite sincerely.

"Well, sir, she never committed," said Mrs. Preston justly.

However, Mrs. Foyle had helped with the "buffy teas"; she had been a great success.

"In some ways Mrs. Foyle is very sweet, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "And, you know, in a way, sir, it was rather a good thing her not being quite a lady. Sometimes there are things one wouldn't quite like a lady to see at a fete, sir."

Stephen and I instantly concluded that Miss Poole hadn't been allowed to have her way about prohibition; and we were perfectly right.

I asked what they had done with the drunks.

"Oh, we just laid them out on the floor, sir, like corpses," said Mrs. Preston airily. Like Mrs. Gamp (whom she otherwise in no way resembles, apart, of course, from the cult of Mrs. Tanqueray) Mrs. Preston would, I'm convinced, cheerfully lay all her neigh-

bors out for nothing. In fact I believe she often performs this charitable office. And Stephen pretends that she looks at us with a hopeful glint in her eyes if ever we are in the least ill—nor is she a person to take illness lightly.

On this occasion Mrs. Foyle conceived a very proper esteem for Mrs. Preston. Our other female friends, seeing Mrs. Preston's position established as the most important woman in our lives, have nearly always felt impelled to attack it—however little claim or desire they may have had to fill that position themselves. Even Mary Tucker used to say that Mrs. Preston ruled us with a rod of iron. Honorable exceptions to this, as to most other rules, were our aunts, who highly approved of Mrs. Preston's sway and were frequently urging us never to do anything to offend her—not that we should have dreamed of doing any such thing.

"Oh, she's a marvell!" said Mrs. Foyle, when she came to have tea with us. "Oh, my Lord, you don't know how lucky you are!"

This slightly annoyed us, for we knew very well how lucky we were—what she partly meant, and what we did not yet know, was how unlucky Mrs. Foyle was in her own servant.

I had never previously been quite sure of such a person's existence. Mrs. Foyle's door had always stood open when we called, or else had been opened by herself. But we were now to learn of the existence and attributes of Mrs. Barron.

Those well-meaning people who take it upon them-

selves to champion the rights of domestic servants against their employers, may very likely have had some justification in the past for their allegations of tyranny. Now the boot is on the other leg: since 1918 servants have been too scarce to allow many cases of tyranny except on their own side. Poor Mrs. Foyle groaned under Mrs. Barron.

The real and deep misery cruel servants can inflict is not generally known. For one thing, tyrannical cooks have long been a subject for mild, middle-class humor on the *Punch* level—and people are often so much ashamed of being browbeaten by their servants that they take the easy refuge in rather worn laughter. For another thing, many people nowadays are so economically minded that they can no longer understand any but an economic dependence. A maid is held to be economically dependent on her employer, though we all know (and she often says) that at any minute she can walk out and get another job. But the dependence of an old lady on a brutal, hectoring and quite irreplaceable servant, is made of little account. There is nothing like superficial social studies for blinding people to the realities of life.

At this stage in our acquaintance Mrs. Foyle still affected to treat Mrs. Barron as a joking matter, but she didn't deceive us.

"We've never seen her," Stephen observed.

"Oh, my Lord, I don't know that I'd dare let you see her," said Mrs. Foyle, her fishy eyes goggling. "I think she'd frighten you away.

"She's an extraordinary little old person," she said.

"She's really past her work. I'm sure she's eligible for an old age pension—but she refuses to tell her age."

"Why do you keep her?" we asked.

"I don't know where I'd get another for the same money," said Mrs. Foyle. "Not that she does any work."

"Then you'd be as well off without her."

But Mrs. Foyle didn't like the idea of sleeping alone in her flat, she said. She might be suddenly taken ill, or thieves might break in, or *anything* might happen. We could not make out what use Mrs. Barron could possibly be in any of these emergencies. She slept in the basement, and like a log, was nearly stone-deaf, or (if she wasn't) stopped up her ears like a deaf adder whenever she didn't want to hear. She would certainly not want to hear cries for help in the middle of the night.

"Poor old Mother Barron," said Mrs. Foyle, now giving her true reason for keeping her on; "she's got no people that take any interest in her. I can't afford to pension her. If she leaves me, she's nowhere to go but the workhouse."

"I suppose she has a horror of that," I said.

"Of course," said Mrs. Foyle energetically. "She's a decent, independent workingwoman, and she's been in good service in her time. Of course she has a horror of that place—all her sort have, and quite right too!"

Mrs. Foyle enlarged on the horrors of institutional life and found a sympathetic audience in Stephen and me—naturally enough, for we had both been to a public school and had disliked it. But there one can look forward to an escape into life, while the inmates

of the workhouse have only death to look forward to.

"They soon kill them off in the workhouse," said Mrs. Foyle gloomily. "When once they get in the infirmary they're in the clutches of the nurses, who are perfect fiends. They wash them hard all over three times a day with coarse yellow soap. Old people can't stand that. I'll save the poor old soul from that as long as I can.

"You, Andrew, and you, Stephen, listen to me," she added solemnly. "Don't you ever, either of you, marry a nurse. They're bad, *bad* women. *I* know."

Our intimacy with Mrs. Foyle continued to increase. Often we heard the three sharp rings of our bell that announced her coming, and sometimes our hearts sank, for we did not always feel up to her. One bell—it might be Mr. Shukry come to talk about dames; two bells—it still might be Mr. Waterfield, come to tell us of new discoveries in his reading of Havelock Ellis—and to both of them we could always present a closed door. Three bells—and our honor was pledged to open and admit Mrs. Foyle. In she came, her umbrella cocked jauntily under her arm, so sure of a welcome that it would have been cruel to disappoint her. Sometimes, indeed, she found us rather weary and unresponsive, but I think she was always willing to put that down to the *mal de siècle*—it is known that modern young people are decadent, lack enthusiasm and have been born tired. (Though whose fault is that, one would like to know?) In the end the convention

was established that she should call on us after tea on Sunday afternoons. I fancy she used to listen to a wireless program at half-past four, and that is why she wouldn't come to tea—perhaps, though she could certainly drink tea in public without showing the condition of her hands, it was a *tour de force* which she only cared to execute on rare occasions.

At first Stephen and I found the change in our relations with Mrs. Foyle a little embarrassing. It was like watching a purely comic character, a flat character in a play or a novel, putting on three-dimensionality and developing serious and even tragic qualities. One holds one's breath, in fear of sentimentality or of some other lapse in taste. Mrs. Foyle had been one of the people we liked talking about, part of our private mythology, like old Waterfield, Mr. Shukry and the pirate captain. (Mrs. Preston of course was much more to us, though we liked talking about her as well.) How dreadful if she should begin to do and say things that we could not talk about without embarrassment.

Moreover it was clear that Mrs. Foyle regarded us in a totally different way from that in which we were regarded by Shukry or Mr. Waterfield—she was really fond of us. She was so poor in personal relations in Christminster that we soon came to mean more to her than anyone else whom she was in the habit of meeting. Neither Stephen nor I have ever taken emotional responsibility lightly, and though left to myself I should probably have been lazy about Mrs. Foyle, Stephen had too strong a sense of duty to allow me

to yield often to my natural selfishness. Certainly he did more than his share, but certainly we were both very kind to her.

She still tried to keep up the pretense of being greatly valued and wanted by Peter and Miranda. It is possible that she thought we should value her more if she were valued by other people—especially by people so much in the public eye. But I think the fiction that Miranda was devoted to her was so essential to her self-respect, even to her life, that she could not now have abandoned it. It was not, perhaps, so much that she used Miranda's fictitious devotion to impress us, as that she used us as an audience for it. It seemed truer when it was put into words, and told as a fact to other people. Mrs. Foyle was a habitually truthful person, and therefore found it easy to believe what she herself had said. We could probably do her no kinder office than to listen uncritically to the tale of daughterly love that we were told. I daresay she deliberately refrained from asking herself how much we believed. It isn't so often that we lack the power to see ourselves as others see us, as that we lack the courage.

She went up to London for a few days, to join her daughter and her son-in-law. We heard all about it on her return to Christminster. She had invited us to have tea with her at a shop in the town; perhaps Mrs. Barron was being more than usually difficult.

We had been for a walk, one of the lovely walks between streams for which Christminster is justly famous. It was now late November, and the pollarded

trees were bare. A dank, mournful river mist, suddenly rising, made us glad to find ourselves back in the warm, lighted, bustling city.

The paneled tearoom was cheerful—but two or three tables had been put together to accommodate a large party; there were several men in morning coats.

“After a wedding, I suppose,” said Stephen.

“No, a funeral,” said Mrs. Foyle emphatically.

She was right—all the ties and waistcoats were black, and there was an unnatural air of hilarity, at the same time forced and restrained. I am afraid that they had just buried a rather nice person. They were not the nearest and the most afflicted, but they were in real grief—too grieved to have to affect grief.

“Poor people!” said Mrs. Foyle feelingly. “Oh, how I know what it is!”

Peter and Miranda were for the moment forgotten. To look at Mrs. Foyle, you would have said that she had had losses—and of course one can hardly live to the age of seventy without having had such experience.

“Oh, I’ve been through it all so often,” she said. “And you never get used to it.”

She began, rather oddly, to talk about her father, and his death—afterwards we wondered if she had deliberately chosen a loss she could bear to talk about, for nature generally does not let us grieve forever for our parents, as she means us to survive them.

“He was such a wonderful man, and he had such a fine voice: I can just hear him singing ‘Fight the Good Fight!’ They sang it at his funeral, and I can never bear to hear it now. Oh, everyone said there was never

anyone like Henry Snaggs—that was his name, I was a Snaggs,” she ended defiantly.

No doubt one can have good cause to be proud of even the most hideous name.

Then she felt more in spirits, and in a mood to tell us about her trip to London.

“Oh, my Lord, the play is wonderful! I never thought Miranda could be so good. You know I’m not a doting mother,” said Mrs. Foyle. “I’m very critical of Miranda’s acting—I always let her know just what I think. I never thought her good in *The Constant Nymph*, though the critics praised her up to the skies. But Ophelia is a part that might have been made for her. There was never such an Ophelia.”

After Christmas, we gathered, the play was going on tour; it might even come to the Globe at Christminster.

“I do so want to introduce you to her,” said Mrs. Foyle.

And we felt quite a lively interest in meeting her.

Mrs. Foyle had had a very good time in London. They had taken her to have luncheon at Boulestin’s, and had pointed out a lot of well-known people to her. I think they had been kind. Miranda had of course been an object of attention all round. She was always bowing and smiling in reply to greetings, and then telling her mother, “That was Aldous,” or “That was Willy Maugham.” I can’t remember exactly who they were: a litany of celebrated names easily goes in at one ear and comes out of the other if it isn’t accompanied by some anecdotes about their owners. But the

implication you were intended to seize was that Miranda called all the great by their first names, and that if she had stayed a day or two longer in London, Mrs. Foyle might have well acquired the same privilege.

They had all gone to tea with Peter's mother in Eaton Square, and now I felt real pity for Mrs. Foyle. She had been a Snaggs, but Lady Susan had borne a historical name, a name associated with the Whig aristocracy and with several centuries of culture and political distinction. And she never let you forget it—this much was evident from Mrs. Foyle's talk. There was a kind of downward bend of the head, and a slight contraction of the mouth when she talked about "Peter's mother."

There was pride in Lady Susan, certainly: she was a great lady of the old school, almost a museum piece. When Miranda's marriage removed her from Kelynych, it had been quite difficult to persuade her that she could live happily in a house with only nine bedrooms. Her antiquated standards were described as if they were matter for kindly and respectful laughter. She was a rare and old-fashioned curio, a real possession for Peter and Miranda. But there was awe in Mrs. Foyle's voice; no doubt she quailed in Lady Susan's presence. It would be very interesting, I thought, to imagine how Miranda got on with her mother-in-law.

"She's very proud of Miranda," said Mrs. Foyle firmly. "But of course she finds the theater a little shocking—not what she's used to. It was a help, in a way, that my husband used to know her family."

New light on Captain Foyle. How had he been connected with Lady Susan's family. Was he a pantry boy who had run away to sea? No—that connection would not have been a help to his daughter. He may, perhaps, have been the son of an agent or a gamekeeper—a sinister, dark-browed, grim, Lady-Chatterley's-lover sort of man. That's where the Captain got it from, of course—I mean, his fatal Byronic heritage. Stephen, after we had seen Mrs. Foyle to her flat and had returned to our own, was inclined to support this conjecture. He added that Captain Foyle probably had possessed some hold over Lady Susan's family, rogue that he was—but this might, or might not have been a help.

Unfortunately we still had the light on in the hall when the bell rang, and therefore could hardly have the face not to open the door. There was Mr. Shukry with a girl.

"I want to come in your flat with this girl," said Shukry with decision. "I think you lend it me, my dear. I bring this bint from the college; but in my house there is too much beobles."

You could have knocked me down with a feather.

"I tell her next time to bring friends for you and your brother," he added.

"Where are we to go?" Stephen asked sarcastically.

"I buy you tickets at the cinema," said Shukry handsomely. "There is a lovely film at the Ritz."

"I don't think I can go out again," I said. "I have a cold coming on."

"I shouldn't think of letting him go out," said Stephen firmly.

"Where I take this girl?" asked Shukry sulkily.

We were unable to advise him.

In default of our advice, so we later heard, he took her home with him after all. When the young woman's ruin was known at St. Monica's, and in a fit of panic and remorse she confessed all to the Vice-Principal, the College authorities (and by no means for the first time) were very uncharitable indeed about Mrs. Foyle—though it was no fault of hers. At all events, she thought it wiser to get rid of Mr. Shukry and his companions and to look out for new tenants for the top flat.

8

AFTER this little misfortune, of which Mrs. Preston had first informed us, it was not only a duty but a pleasure to call on Mrs. Foyle and make kind inquiries.

"The Vice was 'horrible,'" she said with a shudder. "Of course she's always hated Miranda—she was jealous of her from the beginning."

Stephen asked why.

"Oh, my Lord, there were plenty of reasons!" said Mrs. Foyle indignantly. "To start with, Miranda was a much more brilliant historian. She was the most brilliant historian they ever had at St. Monica's—you should have seen the dons' faces when she only got a pass in her finals. They all thought she'd get the top first of the year. I'm sure the Vice was behind that somehow—she always hated her. And then Miranda was so much more attractive of course, and the Vice was still interested in men then—not that I think she's given it up even now. And with a face like hers!"

"Well, she's got her position, and her career," I said. "I suppose she's satisfied."

"I wouldn't be too sure," said Mrs. Foyle. "It's my belief, she'd give her soul to change with Miranda. Not that she could ever have what Miranda has. And yet

the funny thing is, Miranda could have had all the Vice has got, if she'd wanted it. I shall always remember a garden party at St. Monica's one year, at the time of their gaudy. I suppose Miranda was the most distinguished old girl there. She just put the Vice in her proper place. 'I should be where you are today, Flavia dear,' she said, 'if it wasn't for my Art.' "

That, more than anything we had yet heard of her, put Miranda in her own place in our minds.

"Oh, it was horrible to be talked at by that woman," said Mrs. Foyle. "Oh, Miranda would have been furious! 'Your family always seems to come up against St. Monica's in rather an unfortunate way,' she said. I could have slapped her!"

"I'm glad you didn't," I said.

"Oh, my Lord, that wouldn't have done," said Mrs. Foyle. "My landlords are your college, St. Verb's. They all hang together as thick as thieves—they'd have given me notice to quit by Lady Day.

"You know," she said, after a pause—and it was her first confession of weakness—"I do wish Miranda could be here a bit more. At my age you do begin to find things harder to face alone—That horrible Vice! Well, anyway, I stood up to Flavia all right. I've still got plenty of fight in me; I'm not a pacifist, thank God!"

She sat back, and suddenly looked very old—a pitifully unreverend old age, like that of an old, old, battered doll.

"I think we ought to go," said Stephen.

"Don't go just yet," pleaded Mrs. Foyle. "Old Mother Barron's out. Somehow I don't feel like being

alone in the house today. I hope I get a family with a nice woman in it, instead of Shukry and his friends. It would be such a comfort."

We watched with her. She began to tell us the story of Miranda's childhood—there was an excursion they had made, and Miranda got tired and began to cry, "and then my husband said . . ." I hadn't been listening attentively enough, and to my eternal regret missed what he had said—nor was Stephen, when later appealed to, able to fill the lacuna. Anyhow Miranda had laughed, and they had all cheered up, and the day had ended well.

Another flash of light upon the pirate captain. He had been fond of children—and he and poor Mrs. Foyle had sometimes gone out together for a day's pleasure like ordinary married people. Two lines of Juliet's nurse's came into my head almost irrevelantly:

And then my husband—God be with his soul!
A' was a merry man . . .

I was all the more touched by the pathos of Mrs. Foyle's life, from having this little contrasting glimpse of normal happiness. And yet, no doubt, the hook always cast its shadow.

Rain beat on the windowpane. "I hope the poor old soul hasn't got caught in this," said Mrs. Foyle. However, she had the comfort of being sure that we shouldn't leave her, we had run in from next door without coats or umbrellas, and must wait till it stopped.

We heard a taxi slowing on the wet road and drawing up outside. "That's her," said Mrs. Foyle. "She's always wasting her money like that—never will take a bus."

A small figure with a jutting auburn wig, and a hat insecurely balanced on the back of it, stumped in, supporting herself on a very large dark green umbrella.

"I hope you had a nice afternoon," said Mrs. Foyle nervously.

"Rotten!" said Mrs. Barron.

She looked at us, and turned to her mistress: "What 'ave you been doing while I was out? I see yer've got two chaps—tee, hee!" She gave a high, cracked laugh.

"After the ladies at the college 'ave been at yer, too. Aren't you ashamed? *I* know about yer goings on, and I've always been in a decent 'ouse before. I don't know what 'er Ladyship would say."

"*Elle est très difficile aujourd'hui*," said Mrs. Foyle.

"Oh, yer talks foreign?" said Mrs. Barron sarcastically. "Parley-vous Italiano!" she added, in a voice of withering scorn. "I'm an honest North-countrywoman; English is good enough for me. I've never been to college like the young ladies 'ere, as they call 'em. The milkman says to me: 'I'd like to kiss 'em all over.' 'I'd like to kick 'em all over,' I says to 'im. 'The dirty immoral 'ussies!'"

"You'd better go," said Mrs. Foyle, out of the corner of her mouth.

"You want to send yer chaps away before I've 'ad a word with them," said Mrs. Barron.

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Foyle bravely. "They're not used to being spoken to like that."

"Oh, no, they 'ave that Mrs. Preston," said Mrs. Barron. "Yes, sir, no, sir, what can I do for you, madam?" And Mrs. Barron affected airs of a bloodcurdling gentility.

"You'd better go downstairs and take off your wet things," said Mrs. Foyle, laying a hand on her shoulder.

For a moment I thought Mrs. Barron was going to bite it.

"Pushin' and pullin' me about," she grumbled. "And all of yer shoutin' at me and bullyraggin' me! It's not right—three of yer, against one poor old woman! Oh, you'll suffer for it one day when there's a workin'-class government! I'll be a ladyship then, and you'll be me servant. And I'll say: 'Foyle, come 'ere! Foyle, go there!' Not that anyone would 'ave yer for a servant, since yer 'usband 'acked yer fingers off—and yer drove 'im to it. There'll only be the work-'ouse for you. God rest 'is soul, poor gentleman—I 'ope 'e's in 'eaven."

At this point she withdrew, and so did we: it would have been altogether too embarrassing for Mrs. Foyle and ourselves, had we remained any longer with her after Mrs. Barron's last speech.

"I wonder how we shall meet her next time," I said.

"I hope she won't tell us the story of the fingers," said Stephen. "I couldn't bear that."

"And yet I do want to know the truth about them," I said.

"I shall never rest until I know," said Stephen.

And yet, so dark was the horror of Mrs. Foyle's present life with old Mother Barron, that even the pirate captain began to fade into the background.

On Sunday, at the usual hour, the regular three rings announced Mrs. Foyle's visit. She said nothing about her husband or Mrs. Preston, nor did this appear to be deliberate reserve on her part. She had other preoccupations.

"Christmas will soon be here," she said gloomily. "Oh, my Lord, how I hate Christmas!"

"So do we!" said Stephen feelingly.

It turned out that we hated it in different ways, for our memories of it were very different. For Stephen and me, children of an unhappy home, Christmas was a time of awful and precarious truce.

The idle spear and shield were high up-hung:
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood . . .

But it was always an armed peace. We were now, being orphans, able to celebrate Christmas more happily—which we did by not celebrating it at all.

We told Mrs. Foyle that we meant to give Mrs. Preston two days' holiday. For our own part, we should go severally to church at midnight, and then to bed and stay there—I with *Great Expectations*, Stephen with *Bleak House*. When we felt hungry we should get up from time to time and prepare ourselves something simple and comforting—such as bread and milk, or tea

and toast and boiled eggs. There is hardly a better way of getting through Christmas—but the post still remains.

"I often wish we were important enough to put a line in the papers to say that we should be away for an indefinite period, and no letters would be forwarded," said Stephen. "I should like to say *Letters will be burnt*," he added vindictively.

For Mrs. Foyle it was very different. *Nessun maggior dolore*, we're always told—but yet I have often thought she was lucky to have memories of happier days. The memories in themselves were surely something that must have been pleasant to dwell on—from our past Christmases the mind retracted in startled horror. And she had really had the happier days as well. There were Christmas days at her old home in Sussex, enlivened by the beautiful baritone voice of her father, Henry Snaggs, singing "O Come All Ye Faithful," as no one else has ever sung it. Then there were Christmases when Miranda was a little girl. (Stephen told me afterwards that he had pictured Captain Foyle gaily lopping down presents from a Christmas tree with his hook—his sword, as it were, turned for this occasion to a plow-share.) And finally there were Christmases in the war, when Mrs. Foyle was "the pivot of the university"—and there was at least one brilliant Christmas at Kellynch.

But for some reason she was not going to Kellynch this year, and it was very difficult for her to explain to us why. I think she hadn't been asked.

"Peter and Miranda were terribly keen I should go,"

she said. It was pathetically obvious who was keen on Mrs. Foyle going to Kellynch.

"Will they be free then?" I asked.

Yes, the play was coming off a week before Christmas, to give place to a pantomime. After the New Year they were going on tour, in the meantime they were having a houseparty in Somerset.

But Mrs. Foyle said that it was her duty to go to her sister at Leamington Spa.

"Oh, my Lord, it will be awful!" she said. "The old cats Jessie collects round her, both two- and four-legged!"

She gathered up her bag and umbrella, and went away in deep dejection.

"They haven't asked her," said Stephen.

"Or perhaps they have," I said, "and she feels they don't really want her. She's refused, and is hoping they'll press her to go; and they haven't pressed her yet."

"And yet, well can one understand them not wanting her!" said Stephen with a sigh.

"Though they collect far more tiresome people round them," I said.

He earnestly agreed with me. Kellynch, as Mrs. Foyle described it in her more enthusiastic moments, corresponds very nearly to our idea of Hell.

"And yet how miserable she must be there!" said Stephen.

"Wretched!" I said. Indeed hers must be one of the most agonizing false positions that love makes anyone endure, I thought—and her mental strain must exceed

the physical strain the Roman poet shows a fat old gentleman incurring, as he pants after the young object of his affections from one violent outdoor sport to another.

"She'll miss it all at Leamington," said Stephen. "She'll forget the discomfort."

"Yes," I said. "And her sister Jessie's two-legged cats will say, 'We never expected you to honor us, Mrs. Foyle! How is it you're not with all those grand people at Kellynch? I saw an account in the *Tatler* of your daughter's house party.'"

"A pity she doesn't find the comfort we should in the four-legged cats," said Stephen. "How infinitely I should prefer Leamington to Kellynch—where they probably have horses, horrid brutes!"

They had, I remembered—Ursula used to ride in the park. "Perhaps it is that Mrs. Foyle hasn't the money to go there," I now conjectured. "She can't afford all the necessary clothes, and the tips."

"I can't bear it," said Stephen.

And yet in our turn we were obliged to harden our hearts against Mrs. Foyle next time we met.

"Oh, I'm so bothered about the top flat," she said. "Oh, I'm so anxious to have decent people living there!"

Plenty of people wanted flats in Christminster, we told her. She could take her choice among several applicants.

"That's just it," she said. "They come to see me, and they're as pleasant as pie while they want something out of me. It isn't likely they'd insult me, then, is it?"

They all seem very nice, and there's nothing to choose between them—so far I've put them all off, and told them to come again. I can't make up my mind."

"But if they're all so nice, perhaps it doesn't matter which one you choose," said Stephen soothingly.

"Oh, my Lord, Stephen, if I pick one I'm sure to have bad luck!" said Mrs. Foyle. "If she doesn't keep a brothel for undergraduates and get me into a row with the proctors, she'll drink and set the house on fire. Or perhaps she'll be mad. I've got one madwoman below me in the basement already, and that's more than enough—I don't want another one on top of me."

She sank into a gloomy silence. "You've no idea how difficult it is to get people out when they're once in," she said.

Then she looked at us in the crafty way old people have when they know they are just going to make unjustifiable demands on you. It is a craft more evil, because more conscious, than that of children when they try to get round their elders.

"I suppose you and Stephen wouldn't move across?" she said to me coaxingly. "It would be such a comfort to have you there."

"Well, you have us very near, as it is," I said evasively.

"I'm afraid we couldn't possibly move," said Stephen. "It would be an endless business."

"It would make such a difference to have you there," said Mrs. Foyle, greedily.

We looked round—at Stephen's piano, my bookshelves. It was too much to ask, and Mrs. Foyle really knew it—the move would worry and disconcert us for

weeks. And I was sure Mrs. Preston would not at all approve.

"Mrs. Foyle is too difficult, I fear," said Mrs. Preston, when we discussed the problem of the top flat with her. "She's up and down like a regular concertina. The Honorable Miss Carteret and her friend—Lord Dalrymple's daughter, sir—wanted to take the flat. They're very sweet young ladies, sir. They'd have been very good tenants. But poor Mrs. Foyle—first she would, and then she wouldn't—and now she's lost them. They've got a flat in St. Monica's road instead."

"A pity," we said.

"She'll go further, sir, and she'll fare worse," said Mrs. Preston—who often addressed Stephen and me collectively in the singular. We liked it, for it was one of our ambitions to say "I" collectively, like the brothers Goncourt—the firm weight of two personalities behind a single utterance, we felt, would give us a considerable advantage against other people. And Stephen and I, generally in a minority, wanted every advantage we could get.

"Now there's a Mrs. Newsom after the flat, sir," said Mrs. Preston, "a lady (if she is a lady, and I have grave doubts of that, sir) from Woodbury. I'm sure I don't know if it will answer."

"Mrs. Foyle needs a good tenant," said Stephen. "Old Mrs. Barron is a dreadful trial to her."

"A nice woman in the flat above would be a help," I said.

"Yes, that woman of Mrs. Foyle's is no good, sir,"

said Mrs. Preston. "She's long past her work, really. She's mental. Suffers from mental ability, I should say, sir. Mrs. Foyle is far too good to keep her."

Christminster, though empty of undergraduates, was full of schoolchildren returned for the holidays, and of Christmas shopping. Stephen and I, somewhat depressed by the festive season, went to say good-by to Mrs. Foyle, whom we knew we should find in a state of infinitely greater depression.

"To the last I've been hoping something would happen to prevent me from going to Leamington," she said.

Had she been disappointed to find us at the door? Perhaps she had hoped to open it and find a telegraph boy with a last-minute summons to Kellynch.

"Jessie's awful about Miranda," she said drearily. "Of course she's madly jealous. She often says it's a pity Miranda has got on so in the world, otherwise I should see her more. But I didn't want to keep her back, I didn't want her to be tied to me."

There were tears in her voice, and her eyes were too bright.

"Suppose Miranda had been a nice, simple girl, and had married a nice little bank clerk in Christminster," I said regretfully to Stephen, as we came away.

"They could have lived in the top flat," he replied.

We felt so distressed at Mrs. Foyle's unhappiness, which we could not alleviate—except by the altogether extravagant step of moving house—that our pity for the old found an irrelevant outlet in calling upon Mr.

Waterfield. We decided to ask him in to see us during Christmastide.

He opened his door and peeped out cautiously, like a very ancient carp gaping at the glass wall of an aquarium, or some aged animal, slowly stirring in its cage at the zoo.

"It is kind of you to invite me," he said. "But I shall be much occupied during Christmas. The library, as I do not need to tell you, is closed, and I make this enforced vacation an opportunity for arranging and classifying my notes at home. Then, of course, there are one's extra devotions; in fact, I shall be extremely busy."

However, he consented to come and have coffee with us on the evening of Christmas Day.

"I hope you had a good Christmas dinner," he said, and fortunately did not wait for an answer. Stephen and I greatly dislike Christmas fare, both in itself and on account of its associations. We had lunched by the fire, in our dressing gowns, on bread and milk; but we didn't want to go into the whole subject with him.

"I had," said Mr. Waterfield, with deep satisfaction.

We congratulated him.

"After the Divine Liturgy, at Polly and Nick," he said, "I had a four-course luncheon at Lyons, price elevenpence—exquisite."

"What did you have?" we asked.

"First course—baked beans," said old Waterfield, licking his lips. "Second course—welsh rarebit, third course—trifle. And you will never guess what the fourth course was."

Perhaps he had had fruit, we suggested, or did he count coffee as a course?

"No, much better than coffee," said old Waterfield, draining his coffee cup. "A delicious cup of chocolate—price twopence. Quite good enough for me."

"Oh dear," said Stephen afterwards, "do let us grow old like Mr. Waterfield, and not like Mrs. Foyle—how much happier it would be!"

We always hoped our second childhood might make up to us for the wretchedness of our first.

9

AFTER the New Year the weather became sudden, treacherous and malicious. In the black January days anywhere but one's own fireside was acutely disagreeable. In the library one huddled in a great coat near to the water pipes, hunching one's shoulders against the draft. In Church one sat in cold weariness upon one's heels, without the force to kneel upright. Going from one place to another was extreme misery.

Perhaps Mr. Waterfield was more courageous over his studies and devotions; he was still assiduous at them. He even attended an outdoor ceremony on the day of King Charles the Martyr, when a romantic undergraduate proclaimed King Rupert from the steps of the market cross. He came home with a rain-drenched white rose in his buttonhole.

That day fine powdery snow lay on the ground in the morning, or blew about like dust in the wind. And yet, in the evening when I went down to post a letter there were pools of rain in the drive, though the top doorstep, sheltered by the lintel, was still covered with snow. Heavy rain was falling. I went back and told Stephen that my letter could wait for another day.

In the night I woke bitterly, knowing that there was thick snow, although I had not seen it; next day its hateful blanket was over everything. The trees on each side of the Woodbury road seemed much nearer together. Dark pedestrians were slowly picking their way along the pavements. There were perils from above, as well as the slippery foothold, for heavy clots of snow lay on the branches of the fir trees, and on the large broad leaves of laurels or rhododendrons overhanging the road; only a breath of wind was needed to discharge them down the necks of passersby. I slipped, running for the bus, and fell with all my weight on my left ankle. In spite of the pain I thought almost at once with satisfaction that the sprain would oblige me to stay indoors for a few days.

Stephen was open in his congratulations.

Mrs. Preston, however, warned me not to take it too lightly. "A pity it was the left foot, sir," she said solemnly. "Mr. Walter, sir, had a sprain last year; but it was the right foot, fortunately."

"I don't see what difference it can make," I said.

"There's always the danger of it affecting the left great toe, sir," she said gravely.

I asked why that should particularly matter.

"Oh, we know the reason," she said. It was quite clear that it was something very dreadful, and that she was not going to tell me; no doubt she did not think it would make me any happier to know.

"You can't be too careful, sir," she said. "The girl next door to me, sir, the doctor let her go out four days after German measles, and now she's in her grave. The

cold chilled her blood, and she got *septic semia*. She was laid to rest yesterday."

Mrs. Preston gave a flick at the chimney piece with her brush.

"And you know old Mrs. Cheeseman has been taken?" she asked.

We didn't, and we said that it was very sad.

"Oh, I love to see them pass along," said Mrs. Preston cheerfully.

Various people came to see me while I was laid by the leg, among others Mary Tucker and her husband.

"Tommy's just buried old Mrs. Cheeseman," said Mary.

"All that was mortal of her," sighed Tucker. "And a great deal *was* mortal."

"I hardly supposed you had buried her immortal part," said Stephen.

The Tuckers ignored this sally.

"My dear, it's *tragic*," said Mary, who uses big words lightly. "Poor George is *too* brokenhearted."

"Had she been ill long?" I asked. "We never heard anything."

"She was suddenly called Home," said Tucker, in a professional tone.

"For some people it would have been a happy release," said Mary. "Really, for your wretched neighbors, my dears—that old Waterfield, and poor Mrs. Foyle. . . ."

We were quite indignant. Old Waterfield, we said, was one of the happiest people we had ever known, made happy by a never-failing curiosity; and Mrs.

Foyle would be in no hurry to leave the world while her daughter remained in it.

"And what a daughter!" said Mary. "I never cared for Miranda Foyle, and I shan't stop saying so—I don't care if she's got a title, and is a well-known actress. She *ruined* several people's lives at St. Monica's."

"Cyprian told me you said she used to be rather spiteful at cocoa parties," I said.

"My dear, it's a *libel*!" cried Mary. "We *never* had cocoa parties at St. Monica's, only coffee—or sometimes Ovaltine. I remember going to three in one evening!" she said, in a cry of enthusiastic remembrance. Evidently no one ever spoiled Mary's college life.

"Miranda was a *wicked* mimic," said Mary, when she had regained her breath.

This was the first engaging thing we had heard about Lady Elliot.

"The Elliots are coming here with *Hamlet*, did you know?" said Tucker. "My brother is with them. He hasn't got much of a part, poor chap."

Cyprian was playing Osric.

"He's *silly* about Miranda," said Mary. "He thinks there's no one like her. Well, there's one place where she won't be made a fuss of in Christminster—and that's in college. Flavia Johnstone will *never* forgive her."

Miranda had made fun of her in a very cruel and public way for "having a crush on the Prink," which, as far as I understand the phrase, means an excessive devotion to the Principal. Miss Johnstone may have been all the more annoyed if, as people have hinted, it

was an interested devotion—and her chief qualification for the post of Vice-Principal.

But the Tuckers had now given us all the time they could spare, and it was really remarkably good of Tommy to visit my sprained ankle when neither Stephen nor I were his parishioners—and I not even his coreligionist—and when my sickness was hardly serious enough to require a clergyman. Unless, of course, it should go to the left great toe, when anything might happen.

"How lovely it is when people go!" said Stephen, coming back into the room after he had shown them out.

"Almost worth having them," I agreed. "I'm sorry about Mrs. Cheeseman."

"So am I, very," he said.

Poor old Mrs. Cheeseman, now her feet were up forever. We were warm and comfortable by the fire, and the room was scented with Roman hyacinths that I had planted in pots. I suddenly remembered a disturbing French poem about those who were spending their first night in the cemetery. In vain to tell myself that wherever else Mrs. Cheeseman was, it was not at the bottom of a damp pit in the cemetery at the top of the Woodbury road. After all, that is a contradiction—if she really might be anywhere, then she might be there. Fortunately there was good reason to think she wasn't—though a universal human instinct appears to feel that people are in their graves. But I wanted her to be back in her drawing room: I don't like people to die, when they enjoy life. And I wanted even more to chase

away the uncomfortable thought that, of Stephen and myself, one must almost certainly be left alone one day as the survivor—such a thought must occasionally haunt all people who live very closely together. I had always fancied Stephen's mind was too robust to entertain such fond and wayward thoughts, until one day I saw the look of relief in his eyes when I returned to our compartment, on a train between Rome and Pisa; I had been away rather long down the corridor, and he was becoming anxious.

Neither of us, however, feared that I should be dragged away by the left great toe.

Mrs. Foyle said that this was an old wives' tale—but then she was determined that I should be out and about on the Wednesday of next week, to go with her and Stephen to a matinee of Peter and Miranda's *Hamlet*. I am afraid there was almost a note of defiance in my tone when I told Mrs. Preston that I meant to be well enough to go.

"I should be very septic about that," she said with disapproval. And I had to admit that only time would show.

With some misgivings, Mrs. Preston had to admit that I was fit to go out when the day came. We had only to walk next door, for we had ordered a taxi to take us and Mrs. Foyle to the theater.

She was already prepared, and wearing a jaunty little toque. Once or twice she went to the window to see if the car was coming.

"You're sure you said a quarter-past two?" she asked Stephen urgently.

To distract her from her anxiety, I asked her if she had been to the play on Monday or Tuesday night.

"No, I'm just going today," she said. "I hate going out at night, especially in winter. Miranda and Peter wanted me to stay Monday night at the Saracen's Head with them, and go with them to the theater and back. They nearly insisted on it, I was quite afraid they'd make me do it. No, it's far more comfortable to go just like this, with both of you. Miranda has given us very good seats; she wants us to go behind and see her in the second interval."

The car was extremely punctual, and we had all the time to settle down and read our programs and look at the people, that real theatergoers like to have. Stephen and I, left to ourselves, like to get into our seats the second the curtain goes up, and to scramble out before "God Save the King." But today, sitting on either side of Mrs. Foyle, we enjoyed the minutes of anticipation, looking at the curtain. We felt an excitement as great as that with which we went to the pantomime, as small children; and it was not unmingled with an almost painful anxiety.

Peter pleasantly surprised us—it is convenient to call him by his name, for so we always called him to his mother-in-law. He was an unusual and intelligent Hamlet, oddly unactorlike. He played the part with the sensitiveness of an amateur who could play that part and no other—and yet with an efficiency no amateur could ever attain. If he thought Miranda good, surely she must be?

Too soon all hopes of that were shattered. She was a

slim, shrill schoolmistress—her waspish little face seemed to cry out for pince-nez. Indeed so obviously were they implied by her features that at first I *saw* them there. Later, while she was off the stage, it occurred to me as improbable that Ophelia should wear pince-nez, and I looked more attentively on her return and found them lacking. She made great play with her hands, every crimson talon distinctly brandished in our faces.

"Do you doubt that?" came her first words, with quivering passion. Her charming brother Laertes was just off to France, and had asked her to correspond with him regularly. I wondered what she had left in reserve, if she started keyed up to such a pitch.

Presently she had some continuous lines, but then, to my amazement, she turned from Laertes, smirked at the audience, and said her piece like a "humorous reciter":

"But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whilst, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede."

Perhaps, it suddenly occurred to me, Miranda had found a new interpretation of the part of Ophelia. She was showing her as the true daughter of Polonius. But I thought I had better keep that explanation for Stephen.

"Such a finished actress!" whispered Mrs. Foyle. Later she asked me if I had ever seen another Ophelia make herself so much felt in the first act. I had to admit I hadn't.

In the next act I amused myself with elaborating my theory of Miranda's Ophelia. She was to be a daughter of Polonius, vain, boring and pompous; and a weak-minded daughter of Polonius at that. With an almost alarming lack of control she screamed out her description of Hamlet:

"Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors . . ."

One was inclined to wonder if Ophelia had frightened him—a new theory of *Hamlet*.

Then came the awkward moment of the first interval. Over Mrs. Foyle's toque I saw on Stephen's face the confirmation that his feelings were the same as mine—not that I could possibly have imagined any divergence. Stephen finds it very hard to tell lies; and when he is there I cannot tell lies very fluently either—he makes me self-conscious about it. I wondered how we should manage.

"It's a very unusual interpretation of Ophelia," I said, hoping that Mrs. Foyle would take this for discerning praise that meant more than conventional raptures.

She did. All she wanted was to praise Miranda herself, to her heart's content, and anything would do to start her off.

"Oh, my Lord, you should have seen the notices she got, when the play was on in London!" said Mrs. Foyle. "I know too much about the theater to praise her when she isn't good—and she wasn't good in *The Constant Nymph*. But she really is a marvelous Ophelia."

"What are the Christminster papers saying?" asked Stephen.

This, apparently, was an unfortunate question: one of the undergraduate papers had printed a very "unkind" criticism.

"He was trying to say something smart, I suppose," said Mrs. Foyle. "And what do boys of that age know about acting?" However she had soon talked herself back on to happier topics. We sat nodding, and listening to her flow of praise. I suppose if Mrs. Foyle had a thought to spare us, she must have imagined that we were acquiescing in it.

In Act III Ophelia has not much to do—she was, however, dressed up for appearing before the King and Queen—and looked hideous. The undergraduate part of the audience was restive and amused.

"A bad audience," whispered Mrs. Foyle.

"Your honesty," said Hamlet, "should admit no discourse to your beauty."

"Could beauty, my Lord, have better commerce than with honesty?" replied Ophelia, with a devastatingly coy smile—and she pronounced *beauty* as if it were

spelt with a modified *u*. The effect was bloodcurdling.

There was a catcall from the gallery. I looked down at my feet, and I suppose Stephen did the like.

"Disgracefull!" whispered Mrs. Foyle angrily. "They must be drunk! They ought to be turned out!"

But Hamlet took command of the scene, and everything was saved by his voice.

"He's extraordinarily good," I said to Mrs. Foyle.

"Yes, Peter's good too," she said with quiet satisfaction.

After this act we were to go round behind to see Miranda. In a moment of cowardice I thought of making my ankle the excuse to remain in my seat, but I could not expose Stephen alone to this ordeal. Anyway, curiosity would probably have obliged me to go too, even if it had not been an obvious duty.

"Mummy, darling!" cried Miranda, with a sweeping gesture meant to indicate an embrace, in the direction of Mrs. Foyle.

For a moment my gravity was in danger, for I suddenly recollected some of the nonsense old-fashioned Shakespeare critics used to talk about the mothers of Shakespeare's heroines. Had Lady Polonius been anything like Mrs. Foyle? I could quite see her being well enough matched with Polonius. They could hardly have made a worse pair than she had made with the pirate captain. Fortunately this thought was unlikely to occur to Stephen, who cannot control his facial muscles so well as I. His reading until lately had been more scientific than literary.

"And there are your *nice* friends," said Miranda

gushingly. "Cyprian, darling, can you find a chair anywhere?"

I rapidly greeted Osric, who seemed very pleased with himself—but he had to run off at Miranda's bidding.

Miranda was acting away at us all like anything. Anyone who had not seen her on the stage would have thought that she must have considerable histrionic talent—very likely this had been the cause of the original error in her choice of a profession. Mrs. Foyle looked on in adoring admiration. Stephen was frozen stiff with discomfort, and I knew he would be incapable of uttering a word while we remained there. But I felt with relief that he had probably no more inclination to laugh.

"And where's Peter?" asked Mrs. Foyle. "Andrew and Stephen think he's marvelous too." Very fairly she was going to give us a chance of seeing him as well.

"He ought to be here," said Miranda, "but someone tiresome must be keeping him." There followed some actressy talk about the inefficiency of the management, to which I only paid half attention. Cyprian joined in this, in a high, querulous tone. Mrs. Foyle was abundant in expressions of sympathy and indignation. Stephen and I were left out of it, though once Cyprian almost automatically appealed to me with a "don't you think so, ducky?"

Peter, with great good sense, saved himself up for a last-minute entrance, was pleasant and polite with the minimum of effort—after all he must have needed most of his nervous strength to play Hamlet, though he

appeared to take it out of himself on the stage much less than Miranda did. He left very little impression on us, except a vague one of height and slimness. Certainly this brief vision of him went no way towards solving the extraordinary mystery of why he tolerated his wife's acting.

We had left our return to our seats rather late, and in the fluster of sitting down our positions were changed; I was now sitting between Mrs. Foyle and Stephen. How very fortunate their separation was I realized in the mad scene.

At Miranda's appearance, stark mad in white satin, and the tuneless drooling of the first song, Stephen gave a sudden yelp of delighted laughter—a spasm, no doubt, of pure joy, when he must have been oblivious of his company, carried away by the heavenly fun of the moment. Nearer to Mrs. Foyle, I never had that moment of pure mirth—but only an anxious, strained sensation which, I suppose, was really more rich in experience. The woman who wished that sipping iced *crème de menthe* through a straw was sinful might have relished my dangerous, precariously balanced enjoyment of the situation, up to the point where suppression of loud laughter was physically painful.

"Ha, ha, ha!" bellowed a party of undergraduates behind us, unrestrained in their boyish exuberance.

Fortunately for Mrs. Foyle, North Christminster formed a large part of the audience—as was natural at a matinee. It was very shocked. Hamlet, after all, was Hamlet—it wasn't meant to be funny, so one ought not to laugh. It was very sad that Ophelia had lost her wits

—and Miranda Foyle was Lady Elliot, and a well-known London actress.

“Oh, hush!” cried North Christminster; and the boys, who were no doubt goodhearted (as their honest laughter showed), were I suppose loath to spoil anyone’s pleasure—at all events they were quieter.

I hardly dared to look at Stephen—he had his handkerchief stuffed into his mouth, and was swaying from side to side of his seat, his hands clenched.

“I think she’s marvelous,” said Mrs. Foyle, in rather a defiant voice, meant to reach our neighbors in front and behind, and above all (I fancy) meant to reassure herself. I am not absolutely sure but that her faith had begun to waver.

After this exquisitely painful pleasure, the rest of the play was an anticlimax; Peter was good, of course, in the graveyard scene—he was very good. Cyprian, as Osric, was just himself, or one of the selves at his command. I wondered if any of his ex-fiancées, the clergymen’s daughters of Steeple Crampton or Denton Prior, had come in to Christminster to see him. After all, they had promised to follow his career.

Under cover of profuse thanks, we managed to get away from Mrs. Foyle without really saying anything about the play. Obviously she would have liked genuine and spontaneous praise of Miranda, but perhaps she felt it was wiser not to press for an opinion.

Safely home, we tried to make sense of it all. Human beings are like icebergs, three parts submerged: how difficult to know much about them even when the visibility is good, and where the exposed part of them is as

clear as that of Mrs. Foyle to us. Peter and Miranda were only seen at a distance, as through opera glasses; one couldn't hope to understand.

One couldn't hope to understand, but it was only intelligent to try to guess.

"What can be behind Peter's mind?" said Stephen. "She doesn't *look* as if she could hypnotize him."

"It may be a recognized form of aberration," I said. "Possibly old Waterfield could find it for us in Have-lock Ellis. I've heard of two other excellent actors who refused to appear without their unspeakable wives—one was English, and the other Italian. Can it be some form of sadism or masochism?"

"Not sadism, in this case," said Stephen. "Miranda enjoys herself too much."

"You know, perhaps it may be neither," I said, "but just some form of superstition. One is always told how superstitious actors are. Perhaps it's a sort of sacrifice to Nemesis to have one huge, permanent blot on the performance—then he feels the rest will go all right."

"It is a very big sacrifice," said Stephen. "It's like paying too much for insurance—I don't really think it can be conscious."

"It's a mystery," I said. "I suppose there's a convention that the critics are to be gentlemanly, and let her down lightly."

"And of course the boy who wrote the rude notice in *The 'Varsity Under-Grad* didn't know it," said Stephen. "How could he?"

"What about the audience?"

"Most people are very uncritical," said Stephen.

"And I should think Miranda is quite pleased enough with herself to stand up to an occasional catcall."

In fact there hardly was a Miranda-problem at all; there was a very big Peter-problem, but it must remain for ever insoluble by us, for we should never get the necessary data. Peter was too remote from Mrs. Foyle for her to be a useful source of evidence. We must resign ourselves to ignorance.

"Perhaps it is one of the things we aren't *meant* to know," said Stephen piously.

"How very, very lucky Miranda was to get him!" I said.

"And what a mercy there aren't enough Peters to go round, for all the potential Mirandas—all the failures at schools of dramatic art!" said Stephen.

10

Two days later we had a peremptory summons to go to tea with Mrs. Foyle that same afternoon. Miranda was coming, if she could possibly get away from Peter and the theater, and she had expressed a wish to see us. It would have given us pleasure to set her command aside, if we could have done so without giving offense to her mother. This was obviously impossible, so we said we should be delighted to go. Although we had seen that Miranda acted off the stage, and badly too, yet we hoped this meeting with her would be a little less embarrassing than her public performance. We should be unlikely to see her in a tragic role—unless some quite unforeseen catastrophe happened—and there would not be any catcalls. We resolved to set our teeth, and go through with it.

Mrs. Preston was amused to hear of the honor that was in store for us. We had given her and her husband tickets for one of the evening performances, and they had much enjoyed (in different ways) the acting of both the Elliots.

“Poor thing, I was sorry for her really,” was Mrs. Preston’s judicious and charitable verdict on Miranda. “I said to Mr. Preston: ‘If I were that woman’s mother,

she'd know better than to make such a picture of herself in public.' "

"And what did Mr. Preston say?" we asked. We are seldom told anything about his side of the conversation.

"Mr. Preston said something very dry, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "He's a very dry man, sir, is Mr. Preston."

At Mrs. Foyle's we found my old acquaintance Cyprian. As a member of Miranda's company, he was at least near the rose; and Mrs. Foyle was disposed to make much of him in consequence. Besides, he was a visitor from London, and people in North Christminster are apt to attach an exaggerated importance to visitors from London. People in Hampstead or Kensington do not return the compliment when we visit them, though it would be quite as reasonable if they did: we live in the intellectual capital after all.

It is improbable that Cyprian, who seldom rose above parts like Osric, was often made much of, so one ought not to have grudged him the pleasure of making the most of it. And yet his metropolitan, actressy ways were really very annoying.

"Still buried here, my dear?" he asked me, with a scornful smile.

"Any objection?" I said.

"Oh, no, ducky," said Cyprian. "It's no one's business but your own. If you don't *mind* being out of the swim, one ought to leave you to be happy in your own funny little way, I suppose. But you know, coming down here, I do find this place so provincial. I can't think how I stood it so long as an undergraduate—but,

of course, as a boy, one hadn't seen anything better. And then, I was always going up to town, and I used to dash off in vacations to France and Italy. . . ."

He was putting his foreign travels into the plural, I observed—but I let it pass. It is almost unfair on people that I have such a good memory for their sayings and doings—if one cannot help recording, one ought to try to be an angel about it.

"Of course *you*, dear Mrs. Foyle, are in touch with things through Miranda," he said flatteringly. "But the quaint little dons and people—my dears!"

"Tommy and Mary are happy," I remarked.

"They're dear people, of course," said Cyprian. "Dear people, but *pour rire*—one refuses to take them seriously."

"Well, while you're here, Cyprian, you must see if you can bring a little change into all our lives," said Stephen. Not even Mr. Preston could have said it more dryly.

"Perhaps I should," said Cyprian gravely. "This afternoon, for example, I traveled up here in a bus with such a curious old person, with an enormous head like a skull. I patted his knee, my dears, to see what would happen—and he was so pleased. He quite wanted to adopt me. Do you think he will leave me a fortune? I gave him my card, just in case."

"I shouldn't think so," I said. Stephen's warning look was unnecessary; I would not have given Mr. Waterfield away to Cyprian.

"I would like you to accompany me, on my next holiday, to Clifton," said Cyprian in a high, toneless

voice—very passable mimicry of old Waterfield, who is not difficult to imitate. "I would naturally make myself responsible for your expenses—I stay at a very good-class boardinghouse, and on holiday I never stint myself. We should share a whole bottle of Vichy water every day."

I think Mrs. Foyle was just going to identify Cyprian's friend with our neighbor, when she was distracted by a sound at the door and went to admit Cheeseman.

"I'm doing duty for Miranda—as a sort of understudy," Cyprian now confided to us, with a giggle. "She said she couldn't be bothered to come out here today. She's been awfully good to Mrs. F., and she needed a rest. So I'm being a good boy."

I was divided between relief, for Stephen and myself, and a pang for Mrs. Foyle's disappointment.

"What do you honestly think of that woman's acting?" asked Stephen quickly.

"You sound as if you weren't impressed," said Cyprian. "Well, I suppose you don't see a lot of first-class acting in Christminster, so you can't judge very well, can you?"

Was it loyalty, blindness, a wish to snub us, or a wish to make the most of Miranda because he was himself associated with her? We couldn't find out then, because Mrs. Foyle's return interrupted us. No doubt it is another thing we shall never know.

"I hope Miranda will be here soon," said Mrs. Foyle. "Of course she's so busy. If she and Peter take their eyes off the theater for a few minutes, something is sure

to go wrong. We might wait a minute or two for tea."

Cheeseman, who seemed to be bearing his bereavement very well, kept up a flow of talk. Now he was freer, he meant to travel more—he was going abroad for Easter. Did we advise him to go to Corsica or the Italian lakes?

Mrs. Foyle sat gazing into the fire, and forgot to turn on the light. The kettle on the hob sang, and then began to bubble.

"Well, I'll make tea," said Mrs. Foyle regretfully. "Miranda said I wasn't to wait; she mightn't be punctual.

"It's been lovely this time," said Mrs. Foyle in a confidential tone, "how much I've seen of Miranda—of course everyone wants to entertain them while they're here, but she's got out of things. I've seen her every day. I quite had to scold her, because, you know, some very influential people had invited her. I suppose, like a mother, I'm always wanting her to get on—and so I forget she's at the top of the tree and hasn't any further to go."

"We're definitely expecting her today?" asked Cheeseman, with an edge to his voice. Probably he thought he ought to have been given a more positive appointment to see her.

"Well, you know, she said she couldn't be absolutely certain," said Mrs. Foyle. "But I haven't seen her today at all, so I'm sure she'll come if she possibly can."

Her dispensing of hospitality was unusually languid; behind everyone's talk she was obviously strain-

ing her ears for sounds outside. Suddenly she remembered that there ought to be hot scones.

"The kind Miranda loves," she said. "Poor old Mrs. Barron is so deaf, it's no good ringing. Andrew, dare you go and ask for them?"

She did not want to leave her post of vigil.

I went downstairs—the kitchen door was open, and the old creature was bending over the oven, shriveled up like an old dried fish.

But she hadn't lost her voice, it rang out clear: "'Oo are yer, and what are yer doing in my kitchen?"

"Mrs. Foyle sent me for the scones," I said timidly.

"I asked 'oo yer was, not 'oo sent yer," she said grumpily. "Of course *she* sent yer. She's always spying on me—afraid I shall find something to eat, I suppose. Though I don't know where I should do that in this 'ouse."

She flung open the oven door, then laboriously crossed the room and began shifting plates on the dresser.

After a long pause I summoned up courage to ask for the scones.

"Yer'll 'ave yer scones," she said. She held up her fists. "I've only got two of these bastards to work with. Oh, dear, this oven of old Mrs. Foyle's, it breaks me nails; I've got nothing left to scratch with. Good thing me'usband isn't alive! Tee, heel!"

She chose a plate and blew on it vigorously. Then she took the hot scones out of the oven. They were black with soot, and she puffed and blew all over them.

"Covered with sut!" she exclaimed, banging the

oven door violently. "This bleeding oven will drive me mad, like Mrs. Foyle."

She looked at me defiantly. "And if she isn't mad, she's bad—Mrs. Foyle's very fond of men. I know about 'er family and their courtings—and the poor captain, what's dead. 'E was so disgusted, 'e 'acked 'er fingers off, poor man. And I know all about 'er ladyship, young man. Filthy rubbidge!"

"You've been a long time," said Mrs. Foyle when I returned. "I'm afraid she must have been rather difficult."

Miranda had not come during my visit to the kitchen.

Mrs. Foyle tried to be bright and funny about Mrs. Barron, though I suspected that she was now in no laughing mood, and I knew only too well that Mrs. Barron was no laughing matter.

Cyprian curled his lip. I daresay he thought it was just like Christminster bourgeois to talk about servants—no doubt in his circle people more often talk about each other's love affairs. I shouldn't think they were often as individual and interesting as Mrs. Barron, or that as much real life was involved in them as in Mrs. Foyle's servant problem. At all events there could not be the same necessity: one must have a servant, one needn't have a lover.

Not that Mrs. Foyle was without her own fatal and unhappy love.

"I'm *sure* Miranda will look in after tea for a moment," she said. "She wouldn't leave the place without

seeing you, George—and she specially got me to promise you'd come today."

Stephen raised his eyebrows at me, and I remembered Cyprian's admission that she had no intention of turning up. George Cheeseman preened himself a little at being in request.

Mrs. Foyle went to the window; the blind was not pulled down, so she had that pretext. She spent some time fumbling with the cord.

"I suppose Miranda *has* been up here this time?" said Cheeseman, with a note of irritability in his voice.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Foyle. "Though we meet a lot in the town, I wanted so much to have them here to lunch one day, but I don't know how to get Mrs. Barron out of the kitchen. Peter always wants to have one of my famous mixed grills—he's always talking about them."

"Can't he get a mixed grill at home?" asked Cheeseman unsympathetically.

"Not as *I* do it!" said Mrs. Foyle. She was becoming increasingly exuberant as hope was failing.

"Miranda particularly wanted to see some more of you and Andrew," continued Mrs. Foyle, turning to Stephen, who, she was right in feeling, would be kinder than Cheeseman. "She's always asking for news of Mrs. Preston and Mrs. Tanqueray in her letters—she'll want you to tell her all about them."

Cyprian made what no doubt he called to himself a *moue*, so I shall call it a grimace.

Mrs. Foyle, with doubled vivacity, now began to

laugh at him about his elderly admirer. It was a little embarrassing, for all remnants of good taste were thrown to the winds.

"I said I'd go in and see him when I left you," said Cyprian.

"No, you don't do anything of the kind!" said Mrs. Foyle. "I'll take better care of you than that! You're to stay with me till the last moment!"

The old are as grasping, I thought, and as lacking in loyalty to each other as children. How many virtues only belong to the prime of life! Certainly all the social virtues—children of the first or second childhood, all anarchists, may be fit for the Kingdom of Heaven, but how unfit for life on earth!

"I'm going to keep you till you're due at the theater," said Mrs. Foyle.

Cyprian (and I like to think he did it out of kindness, though Stephen disagreed with me here), now gave Mrs. Foyle her *coup de grâce*.

"It's six o'clock," he said. "I'm afraid we can't expect Miranda any more. I know she absolutely *had* to see someone at half-past six."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Foyle. And if the words were inadequate to what I feel sure was a moment of cold despair, yet "Oh, dear" is all one has to say when very much worse things happen, and the whole world falls in ruins round one.

This, however, must have been a bad moment. She craved to see the Beloved, who did not come; friends had been asked to meet her, at her own suggestion; and they had been snubbed. There they were, sitting

round, slightly hostile witnesses of Mrs. Foyle's discomfiture—or so she may reasonably have thought.

Cheeseman certainly was a hostile witness. Mrs. Foyle had little idea that Stephen and I were with her entirely for her own sake, and not at all for Miranda's—nor would she have been pleased had she known.

She turned to Cyprian, perhaps feeling that as he saw so much of Miranda in his professional life, he might be expected to bear the present disappointment better than the rest of us.

"Tell her it didn't really matter," she said bravely. "Of course I shall be seeing her for coffee tomorrow morning."

There is all the difference in the world between that state one remove from despair—when one still indulges an almost impossible hope, still imagines a step outside, the opening of the door, and what one will say and what she will answer—and the state of final despair when one knows she can't come. Mrs. Foyle must have been making that cruel transition. Cheeseman, a minor man of letters after all, ought to have been helped by his reading to understand what was happening, even if his heart told him nothing. He ought—oh, he ought to have held his tongue.

Instead he clacked on. Names of people rather more in the public eye than himself were displayed, or were allowed to trickle out with mock modesty. We were meant to be impressed; I think we were meant to draw the conclusion that, knowing as many interesting people as he did, it didn't matter to him if Miranda Elliot

failed to come to meet him at a little tea party in North Christminster.

And of course it could not have mattered to him very much. That is the advantage of being a prey to snobbery, sociability, or lust—which can all be gratified in so many ways—over the peace-destroying passion of Love, which insists on the one, irreplaceable individual who cannot be in more than one place at one time, is seldom in the right place at the right time, and often has no desire to be there.

Stephen and I said it was time for us to be going, and though Mrs. Foyle made a formal effort to detain us, I think she was glad that we should break up the party. Cheeseman also got up to go. She clung to Cyprian—after all, he was going to see Miranda again before she could.

However, while Cheeseman was making his departure, Cyprian managed to intimate to me that Stephen and I would be welcome at a small cocktail party at Miranda's hotel next day, to which she hadn't invited her mother. I told him, rather coldly, that we were otherwise engaged.

At his door we found old Waterfield moving about uneasily, like an elderly animal at feeding time.

"Good evening," he said to us. "I am expecting a very delightful and desirable visitor, a young actor whose acquaintance I have had the good fortune to make. I understand that his company is performing here this week."

"Indeed," we said.

"Leading the scholarly life, one is apt to detach one-

self too much from the world," said Mr. Waterfield. "This young man came like a breath of fresh air. I suppose he may have changed my life."

We looked at him with compassion.

It was evidently wasted. Old Waterfield was, and was going to continue to be, very happy: it was the intellect that Cyprian had stimulated, not the affections.

The old man produced a sheaf of pamphlets.

"I received these by post this morning," he said. "I believe if I had not been stirred by my meeting with this young man, as by a trumpet, to a sense of my isolation from the busy world, I might have left them unread. At all events, I am convinced I should not have responded to their call."

He paused. We were now intended to ask what the pamphlets were about, and we did not fail him.

"The Society for the Restoration of Fallen Monarchs," he said impressively. "I mean to devote the rest of my life to its objects."

"What monarchs does this organization propose to restore?" I asked demurely.

"All of them!" said old Waterfield. "At present we are perhaps most interested in restoring the Imperial Family to Russia. But we do not neglect the claims of the kings of France, Spain and Portugal. Mark you," he said emphatically, "it is the *senior* branch of the house of Braganza that will enjoy our support."

He said it so sternly, that Stephen and I felt guiltily as though we had been supporters of a junior branch.

"King Rupert's return to his United Kingdom will of course be an all-important object with us," said old

Waterfield. "You will ask what is to become of the present reigning family—blameless usurpers whose qualities of rulership have been proved, and should not be allowed to be wasted. I do not find that point considered in the prospectus. I have myself an important suggestion to make, and you will not easily guess what it is."

We told him that we should not attempt it.

"It is a very daring suggestion," he said. "It entails nothing less than the setting aside of the Salic law. I propose to place them upon their ancestors' throne at Hanover! Now what do you say to that?"

"What will Herr Hitler have to say?" asked Stephen.

"I fancy," said Mr. Waterfield with dignity, "that over high dynastic problems an upstart like Mr. Schickelgrüber will not be consulted. I understand that he is a person of no birth, and of dubious antecedents."

During this conversation I saw Cyprian leave Mrs. Foyle's and catch a bus into town, unperceived by old Waterfield.

But Mr. Waterfield had almost forgotten his expected visitor, in the grandeur of his dynastic schemes for Europe.

"I now feel," he said, "that I really have a finger upon the pulse of the modern world."

11

ANOTHER finger held to the fast-beating pulse of the modern world was that of Miss Poole and her association. They, however, were much more concerned about Herr Hitler's activities than about the high dynastic problems that occupied Mr. Waterfield. Stephen and I received an invitation to one of their meetings, in the same dissenting church hall where we had gone to collect our sandwich boards. The letter addressed us as "dear friend," which at first we were inclined to resent as a familiarity; then we reflected that the Quaker sense of the word might be intended, in which case it was very nearly a compliment.

We found Miss Poole and Mrs. Shrubsole the center of interest. They were standing by a large and handsome cake on which PEACE was written in pink sugar.

"Some of us felt . . ." began Miss Poole.

Stephen looked at me. "Some of us felt" is a locution which we had long ago adopted as a private and port-manteau way of summing up a certain kind of behavior. Anyone who has often attended any kind of meetings concerned with Good Works must know that when "some of us feel," then unquestionably some sort of supererogatory good works ought to be done. Some

of the rest of us generally feel very good for feeling what *they* feel. Others have no explicit intention of imposing what *they* feel upon the rest who may not feel likewise. At the same time it is pretty severely implied that if the rest of us do not feel likewise, when it has once been fairly put to us, then we are worms.

In spite of these ominous words, what some of us felt on this occasion was very innocent.

"Some of us felt that it would be nice to celebrate the occasion: it is the first birthday of this Christminster branch of our organization," said Miss Poole. "And Mrs. Shrubsole has presented us with this beautiful cake."

"How nice that there are plenty of people here to eat it!" said Mrs. Shrubsole.

"We had imagined a few of us having to make great efforts," said Miss Poole.

Mrs. Shrubsole ought to cut it, we were all agreed—someone humorously suggested that it ought to be cut with a plowshare.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she protested. However she began the operation ceremonially, and then the cake was efficiently sliced up and distributed by Miss Poole.

There was a timidity at first about doing anything so gross as eating it.

"We should not just *eat* it," said someone, no doubt voicing the feelings of some of us for there were murmurs of approval.

"But we *should* eat it," said someone else.

Cheeseman, with a happy inspiration, elevated his

slice of cake. "Many happy returns!" he said, and it was felt he had neatly solved the problem of what we should do. But unluckily the cake was of a crumbly consistency, and half fell to the floor.

"Evidently this cake was intended to be 'received, not lifted up,' " I observed to Stephen. It was really a very good cake.

" 'Not to be gazed upon or carried about,' " he quoted promptly.

However this quasisacramental cake appeared to have the effect of a love feast, for the dumb ox, who of course was there, began to talk about Love.

"Well, yer see, we get together, and we 'ave a bit of cake. Well, if more people was to do this, there'd be more Love about. I'm not very good at speaking, but it seems to me . . ."

We all murmured a perfunctory agreement. Love was a word to which we all paid lip service, and no one wanted to hurt the dumb ox's feelings—if indeed he had any underneath that bovine exterior.

But some of us went further. They thought he had really got hold of a valuable idea. If we were to send a simnel cake at Easter to General Franco, for instance, that might put some love into his heart.

The idea was rapturously taken up. Poor General Franco had probably never seen an English simnel cake. The more people got to know about the ways of other countries, the more they would come to love them, and the nearer would be the reign of universal peace.

I murmured a doubt whether cupboard love would

have very much effect upon General Franco—he might not even like our confectionery.

Stephen was far more severe. "It would be better not to make ourselves quite so ridiculous," he said sternly. And the rest of us applauded.

For once it was a victory for the rest of us. With hurt smiles some of us withdrew their suggestion, since it was thought unwise—but I'm sure they felt it had been unworthily sacrificed to our worldly wisdom, and that they were more loving than the rest of us—as indeed I have little doubt but they were.

Someone asked if we had yet called on our new neighbor Mrs. Newsom, who had just come into the flat above Mrs. Foyle's. Was she likely to support the Cause?

"You never know with Roman Catholics," said Miss Poole. "Sometimes they're with us, and sometimes very much the other way."

"This notion of the 'Just War,' " said Shrubsole.

"But as it's never laid down whether a particular war is just or not," I said, "we have to decide for ourselves in each case—just like anyone else. For everyone it is really a question of value, not of doctrine, whether he's a pacifist or not—almost a question of temperament. That's why so little good comes of talking about it."

"And yet, very few Roman Catholics are pacifists," someone said.

"I think it is because their clergy are so influential with them," said Stephen. "Clergy are always so pugnacious."

"Like poor Mr. Tucker," said Mrs. Shrubsole.

Stephen and I were really much more concerned to find out whether Mrs. Newsom was likely to be a kind neighbor to Mrs. Foyle, than to ascertain her views on Peace and War. That she was a Catholic did not tell us much either way. If she had been a Quaker we should have had some positive grounds for satisfaction—there is something so comfortable about the Society of Friends.

To Stephen, when he saw her for the first time in the street, Mrs. Newsom appeared rather flashy. He told Mrs. Preston so.

"I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Newsom had been an actress," he said.

"She's not a lady, sir, more what I call a *person*," said Mrs. Preston in a final tone. "I met her the other day, and she talked to me just like a common person. I didn't hesitate to ask her some things I shouldn't have asked a real lady, sir. And she didn't mind—not like what a lady would."

"Hasn't she got a little girl?" I asked.

"A horrid little thing," said Mrs. Preston decidedly. "And there are a lot more coming."

We looked at her in some alarm. One would hardly like one's next-door neighbor to give birth to quadruplets—it would bring newspapermen and all sorts of other undesirable people down on us. And it would be most unfair on Mrs. Foyle.

But fortunately that was not what Mrs. Preston meant.

"Several boys and girls will be coming back for their

holidays, sir," she said. "I don't think poor Mrs. Foyle knows how many. I'm afraid she is in for a nasty shock, sir."

Mrs. Foyle, we knew, was not at all fond of children.

"I wish she'd had the Honorable Miss Carteret and her friend," said Mrs. Preston with a sigh. "Such sweet young ladies, sir! I was saying to Mr. Preston that they would have been much better tenants. Mrs. Newsom is just the sort of woman, sir, who brings a neighborhood down."

Mrs. Foyle, however, seemed very pleased with her tenant when she next came to see us. "Oh, she's a splendid woman," she said. "She works so hard to keep her family. I'm never mistaken in a woman, and I could see at once she was the right sort."

We said, rather doubtfully, that we were glad to hear it—Mrs. Preston, we told her, had not been favorably impressed.

"Your Mrs. Preston is a snob, my dears," said Mrs. Foyle. "She wanted me to have the Carteret girl, because she's an honorable. But I don't like Lesbians, knocking their pipes out all over the furniture—and it's not like having a real woman in the house. Now Mrs. Newsom would be a comfort if one was ill."

She did not look at all well.

"I'm run down," she said. "I don't know why—it's the time of year, I suppose."

"Why don't you have a change?" we asked.

"Nowhere to go," she said. "I had enough of Leamington at Christmas— Oh, my Lord, I should say so! I'm going to Kellynch in August."

We asked if she couldn't go there for a bit now.

"Oh no!" she said, quite shocked at the idea. "They're all over the place with *Hamlet*. Miranda writes that they had an amazing success in Liverpool."

She sighed. It wasn't only the dull afternoon that made her look gray in the face.

"Mrs. Barron gets me down," she said. "Horrid old woman! Do you know, I'm frightened to go into my own kitchen?"

She shuddered. "It's not so much having saucepan lids thrown at one's head—not that she actually tries to hit me, though she wouldn't care if she did!"

Some people would say that she ought not to have made a fuss about saucepan lids when in the pirate captain's time knives used commonly to be thrown at her. It is the sort of stupid and unsympathetic thing that some people would say. During a period when we are tolerably well treated, flesh grows again over a sore place, and it is a very sensitive flesh that winces before a renewed attack. So a boy, treated as a gentleman for a short time after emerging from the horrors of school, has all the more to suffer if he finds himself in the Army, and again treated like dirt. So after several visits when there was nothing to be done, we are all the more cowardly when at last the dentist takes down the drill.

It is comic, incongruous, to be hit on the head by a flying saucepan lid, but yet it is not at all pleasant.

"But it's more the awful things she says," said poor Mrs. Foyle. "Horrible, dirty, insulting things—I think she's got a devil in her."

Hard words break no bones, but then we are not only made up of bone. Reading in libraries, as I do, one sometimes picks up odd little bits of knowledge. I thought of that great battle between two hostile tribes in Madagascar, that lasted for five days, in which the arms employed were lances, arrows, stones and hard words—though a cannon, like a stage property, was indeed once hastily dragged from one side of the field to the other. On the fifth day one tribe withdrew in disorder, and the casualties could be counted—there were five wounded.

It was clear that poor Mrs. Foyle often withdrew in disorder, leaving Mrs. Barron mistress of the field; and I'm afraid the words lodged in her bosom by the enemy were poisoned words that went on festering afterwards.

"My head aches so, sometimes," said Mrs. Foyle. "And then I feel quite sick and frightened next time I have to go downstairs—once I nearly fell on the stairs, my knees were so weak under me."

"You've got to get rid of her," said Stephen authoritatively.

"Oh, if only I could!" she said. "But it's no use thinking of it."

We protested.

"She's only the workhouse to go to," she said. "And that's Death!"

"But it's not as if she were an old servant of yours," I said. "You've not had her long."

"Or as if she were at all nice," said Stephen.

"I wouldn't send a stray dog there!" said Mrs. Foyle.

We were more sorry than surprised when Mrs. Newsom called to tell us that Mrs. Foyle had had some sort of a seizure. She was totally incapacitated, but it appeared to be more alarming than dangerous.

"Who's to tell Lady Elliot?" seemed to Mrs. Newsom to be the main question, and it was evident that she very much wanted to do this herself.

"I thought as you were old friends . . ." she said. We noticed her eyes roving over our things, as if she were pricing them, and at the same time trying to assess our social position. She didn't finish her sentence, but began a more promising one: "It might come better from a woman—and then she could write and ask me little things. . . ."

We had no desire to correspond with Miranda, and gladly waived our claim. But unfortunately Mrs. Newsom showed no great talents for dealing with the emergency. She had no idea of what was important, and what wasn't.

"We shall see what Lady Elliot says," was all she had to say about anything.

"But Mrs. Foyle can't possibly be left alone, in that state, with only that awful old servant," said Stephen. "We shall ask Mrs. Preston to go in."

"Oh, would you? Well, that will be splendid," said Mrs. Newsom vaguely, and she disappeared—no doubt in order to write a report to Miranda.

Mrs. Preston, as we expected, was delighted. "Anything in the way of sick-nursing comes natural to me,

sir," she said. "Mr. Preston's sister can look after him, sir, and I'll go and stay next door. It's not fit that Mrs. Foyle should be left."

We asked if she could find someone to do her work in our flat while she was away with Mrs. Foyle.

"I'll do it myself, sir," she said indignantly. "I wouldn't neglect you, sir. I'll find the time. I was always one for work, sir."

We waited anxiously for her report on the situation, consumed with curiosity about her future relations with old Mrs. Barron.

This, indeed, was the side of the matter we preferred to speculate about—taking the common English refuge from feeling in the humorous. But we were both tormented by the picture of that undignified little body, still tenanted indeed by its own indomitable spirit, but temporarily not controlled by it. That spirit would flare out of the eyes and see what was being done to the unfortunate body while it was powerless to interfere. Well, we had the right not to worry overmuch. We had sent her Mrs. Preston—and that was the kindest thing we, or anyone else, could have done for her.

Mrs. Foyle was, we were told, fully conscious, though unable to speak or move—she understood what was said to her, though capable only of inarticulate noises expressing pleasure or discontent. It had naturally given her great pleasure when Mrs. Preston appeared at her bedside.

"She was very touching, sir, the way she held on to my hand and wouldn't let it go," said Mrs. Preston. "Very touching, really!"

She wouldn't have anyone else in the room, except the doctor; she screamed when Mrs. Newsom tried to come in.

"Why was that?" we asked, in surprise. Mrs. Newsom had at least seemed to mean well, even if she was trying to profit by the occasion to introduce herself to Miranda. And Mrs. Foyle always liked her better than we did.

"Well, poor Mrs. Foyle's appearance, sir," said Mrs. Preston, with delicacy. "She's very sensitive about that, sir. Of course she hasn't a hair on her head, and she has to show her hands. You know, when she's well, she generally likes to wear gloves, sir."

Yes, we felt a distaste for Mrs. Foyle's exposure to the gaze of Mrs. Newsom, whom we did not entirely trust, and who was certainly not quite a lady. I daresay she had made a mistake in her choice of tenants: Miss Carteret's honest, manly glance would have been easier to bear—and as she was an honorable (and Miranda's distant connection by marriage), she would have had no need to exploit the situation for her own social advantage.

"Those poor little hands!" I said. "Did her husband *really* cut her fingers off?"

"The idea, sir!" said Mrs. Preston, quite angrily. "She was born like that, sir. She hasn't got any toes either—that is, only the first joint, sir."

All the more did we admire the poor stunted little creature, insecurely balanced as she must be (and as we had never suspected), for the energy and courage with which she had hopped through life—running

about her house, and in and out of the sheds in her garden.

"Her feet are a heart-rendering sight, sir," said Mrs. Preston.

And yet how easy to imagine one's gorge rising at the sight of that horrible deformity—and Miranda was probably conscious of it all the time. It was a very good thing it was so well hidden, or the effect on old Waterfield would be incalculable.

For Mrs. Barron's deformity of mind, Mrs. Preston had much less pity.

"The things she said to me about poor Mrs. Foyle, sir, I couldn't repeat them," said Mrs. Preston. "'You're not to talk to me like that about your mistress,' I said, 'and when she's lying helpless upstairs, too!'"

But not even Mrs. Preston could shut Mrs. Barron up.

"'I've said all that, and worse, to her face,' she says," Mrs. Preston went on. "I said: 'Aren't you ashamed to talk like that to a lady?' You know, sir, even in my humble position, I wouldn't allow anyone to talk like that to me."

I am sure she would not. Words like Mrs. Barron's may sting and fester, but "people of our class" (and Mrs. Foyle was on the fringe of our class, near enough at any rate for Mrs. Preston to call her a lady for the sake of convenience) meekly endure them, however great our resentment. A decent, working-class woman will soon take some action to stop them.

Indeed it was Mrs. Barron's final undoing when she

so far forgot herself as to insult Mrs. Preston unparadonably. For some days, we gathered, she had been muttering round the kitchen, "Mrs. Preston this, and Mrs. Preston that," accompanied by crashes of crockery, and a violent banging of the oven door, and other gestures of anger and contempt. But she had been prudent enough to say nothing outright.

"'Well, you'd better speak up,' I said," said Mrs. Preston. "Then she says to me: 'Who are you to bully me, Mrs. Preston? When you're poisoning my mistress to get all her money!' 'Well, really, Mrs. Barron,' I said, 'I'm not going to listen to that sort of thing being said to me. Mr. Preston wouldn't allow it.' A working-class person has to look after her character, sir, it's all she's got."

She had gone straight upstairs, and had told Mrs. Newsom that she couldn't undertake to nurse Mrs. Foyle if Mrs. Barron remained in the house.

"'No, I can't undertake, madam,' I said. 'I can't undertake.' 'Won't you wait till we hear what Lady Elliot has to say?' she said. 'No, madam,' I said. 'She must go at once—she's no use, really. If she stays, I can't undertake.'"

Mrs. Newsom was too scared to do anything but take authority and send Mrs. Barron away. She was received by a friend in the town, who used to take her in when Mrs. Foyle was at Leamington or Kellynch. Before Mrs. Foyle had properly recovered, Mrs. Barron was securely lodged in the workhouse. As she had not this incarceration on her conscience, I think she was much relieved.

12

MUCH has been written of the exquisite poetry of a Christminster spring—of green budding leaves in the sunlight against the gray walls of a city about a quarter as old as western civilization. *Plurimi pertransibunt, sed multiplex erit scientia*—a little less evanescent than the spring green, and far less decorative, but yet in our humble way as authentic a part of the eternal Christminster, Mr. Waterfield and I found ourselves gazing out of the same library window at a flowering tree in a college garden. In the nearby chapel choir practice was going on:

Forty days and forty nights
Thou wast fasting in the wild . . .

Mr. Waterfield chuckled: "*Lenten is come with love to town*" he observed surprisingly.

Meanwhile the Germans had entered Austria, and not with love. For some of us (as Miss Poole and her friends might have said) the dull ache of misery and foreboding then began, that has never left us since. On some days, when the news is even worse than usual, or when one's spirits are lower, it sharpens into a definite

pang—and then nerves are frayed and tempers easily lost. Stephen and I—who dislike losing our tempers—have always found comfort on these occasions in the society of animals and children, who are not suffering from the same preoccupations. For want of the genuine thing, one can talk to those in their second childhood and find oneself soothed.

“The present unhappy events in Austria,” said Mr. Waterfield, “prove, if any proof were wanted, the necessity of such an organization as the Society for the Restoration of Fallen Monarchs, whose aims and objects I lately detailed to you. Had the Hapsburgs been back on their throne, Mr. Schickelgrüber would not have ventured on this piece of impertinence. Now, I fear, the restoration of the Austrian Imperial family will be indefinitely held up. It is very provoking.”

A library assistant approached, and asked him not to talk so loud.

“May I enroll you and your brother as members?” he said, in a penetrating whisper.

I gave him a shilling for each of us. It is a good cause that can make anyone so innocently happy, and one ought to support it.

I have never been taken in by the nonsense that people talk nowadays about “Escapism,” which, as far as I understand the word (and I understand it very much better than almost anyone who makes use of it), means any and every form of human activity other than embittered discussion of the more uncomfortable problems of the day. After the “escape” of a conversation with old Waterfield, I had the misfortune to run into

Mr. Shrubsole—and there was no escape. As Mr. Shrubsole was saying a number—a very great number—of the things everyone else was saying about Austria and Hitler, and as he had neither special knowledge, original ideas, nor peculiar elegance of diction, there is no sense in repeating what he said. Civility obliged me to listen—I reflected on the stupid little papers I sometimes read, from whose point of view I was now behaving like a good and responsible citizen. How much more did Mr. Waterfield help me to do my duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call me—he helped me to go home to tea with Stephen in a good temper (in spite of Shrubsole), and had even provided me with a little talk to take back. I should take good care to bring back nothing of Shrubsole's conversation—Stephen also had read the *Daily Telegraph*.

I disengaged myself. "I must run for that bus," I said. "You never know where pirates will stop."

"What! You're going to take a pirate bus?" Shrubsole called after me, in a shocked voice. "Think of the poor busmen!"

I resisted the temptation to answer that I should think of them on my way home in the pirate bus, which I immediately boarded. The Christminster busmen were on strike, no uncommon occurrence with them. The cause was the dismissal of one of their fellows for rudeness to a passenger—they are a very rude set of men. On the other hand, the restless life of a conductor, passed in perpetual drafts and in a smell of petrol, must be exceedingly trying, and Christminster pas-

sengers may often be most annoying. I looked out of the window on the Woodbury road—the most annoying people in Christminster, I recollected, are inveterate bicyclists, and the bus conductors are perhaps spared more than they know. It's all very difficult. Anyway, when the busmen go on strike they are probably not very much considering anyone's interests but their own—and the rest of us, therefore, will do well not to be too sentimental about them. It would be exaggerated tenderness to waste our money on taxis for their sake, or our time in walking—but of course Shrubsole had plenty of both these commodities to spare.

I found Stephen rather glum. "When the weather isn't vile, the news is," he said. "How very few days there are when one can feel really well!"

We were cheered up by the arrival of Mrs. Preston, who came to pay us a visit—out of rule, for it was not her hour; now she was working next door she was more attentive than ever. She wanted to see that everything in our flat was as it should be, and she had brought us good news of Mrs. Foyle.

"Her illness has passed the zither," she said triumphantly. "Yes, sir, the doctor said this morning that Mrs. Foyle's illness had passed the zither."

She had been able to speak a few words, quite enough to show (though no one had ever doubted it) that her mind was perfectly clear. She said she hoped that people hadn't let Miranda worry too much about her.

"I don't see Miranda worrying too much," I said.

"That Mrs. Newsom, sir," said Mrs. Preston scorn-

fully, "she's writing to her all the time and telling her not to worry."

Indeed Mrs. Newsom must have been subject to a severe struggle at this time. No doubt one part of her was eager to bring Lady Elliot to Christminster at once, for the sake of making acquaintance with her—the other half of her must have been aware that Lady Elliot would like her better for sending the most reassuring news she could. It was so evident that Miranda wanted to believe the best, that the latter half won the victory.

"At first she said to me, 'Mrs. Preston,' she said, 'I don't feel we ought to worry Lady Elliot—what is there that she could do? She couldn't talk to her mother, while she's in this state, and it would only be sad for her to see her like this.' 'She ought to be here, ma'am,' I said. 'It's her place to be with her mother.' 'Well, I'll tell her how it is,' she said.

"And now," Mrs. Preston continued, "Mrs. Newsom says to me: 'The danger's all over. We mustn't drag Lady Elliot away from her work now. It would only worry poor Mrs. Foyle if she thought we'd dragged her daughter down here.'

"If she was a natural daughter, she'd want to come," said Mrs. Preston. "And that's what I said to Mrs. Newsom straight out. 'Oh, Lady Elliot's *devoted* to her mother,' says Mrs. Newsom, in that way of hers."

Poor Mrs. Foyle—for all her brave words about Miranda being worried, one could be perfectly certain nevertheless what she really wanted, as she lay there, barely articulate in bed. In return for all those

years of devotion to her daughter, nothing could have satisfied her but an anxious and generous love that forced Miranda to her side, no matter how difficult it was for her to come, nor what comfortable words Mrs. Newsom wrote. And if Miranda, Mrs. Newsom, or Mrs. Foyle herself, thought or tried to think anything else, they were deceiving themselves. Human problems, for all their frequent complications, can at times be so very simple.

Miranda, by holding aloof, was now setting a different problem to herself and her mother—and incidentally to Mrs. Newsom, Mrs. Preston, Stephen and me. How were we to disguise her lack of love? And here again, the answer was simple: we must all put the best face on it we could—but real disguise was impossible.

“As if she couldn’t leave her play-acting!” Mrs. Preston very justly exclaimed. Well, we must all conspire to pretend that she couldn’t.

A few days later we were admitted to see Mrs. Foyle; she had been made neat and tidy to receive us, and wore a cap which we later learned was a loan from Mrs. Preston. She was very glad to see us, and profoundly grateful.

“I can never thank you enough for sending me your wonderful Mrs. Preston,” she said. “She’s saved me from death—from worse than death! I might easily have been paralyzed if it hadn’t been for her.”

We said we hoped that Mrs. Newsom had been of some help, for indeed it had been a testing time for a new tenant.

"Oh yes, she's been so good about writing to Miranda and reassuring her," said Mrs. Foyle. "I was so afraid, as soon as I knew anything again, that they'd drag her away from her work to come here."

But there was a hungry look in her eyes.

"It must be awfully difficult for her to get away," said Stephen kindly.

"Impossible!" cried Mrs. Foyle. "Of course, dear girl, she'd have done the impossible—but her understudy is no good at all and audiences would have been dreadfully disappointed, and Peter quite put out. He's nervous and crotchety if he has to play without her. Then there's all the expense of traveling down from the north."

I was so taken aback by the last excuse, that I stupidly said that I shouldn't have thought expense need be an object with the Elliots.

Mrs. Foyle looked very grave. "Peter never seems to have any money to spare," she said. "Miranda's always telling me that they have to be very careful. Of course they're far too generous: they put into the company every penny they make at the theater, and I'm afraid some of their own money as well." She paused. "They've no one to save for, of course—why should they deny themselves anything for the sake of Margaret Elliot and those children of hers?"

A satisfactory bitterness in her tone made us feel she was really recovering. Her illness had indeed passed the zenith.

"I couldn't help thinking about those toes," said Stephen on our way home; it was the first time we had

seen Mrs. Foyle since that revelation of Mrs. Preston's.

And yet the pirate captain still remained in our minds armed with a hook—and buried with that hook in a churchyard at Chislehurst, supposing him to lie in consecrated ground—which was more than he deserved, though perhaps one ought not to judge. After all, he *might* have had a hook, even if he did not maim his wife with it; he was certainly a ruffian. Nor would he have needed more than one hand to throw knives at her with.

Thus I pleaded for that instrument.

"But now the one argument connecting him with it is gone," said Stephen, who had a ruthlessly logical mind.

"The one clue connecting Oscar Slater with a murder was promptly proved to be false," I said. "That didn't prevent him doing twenty years hard for it."

"But that," said Stephen, "was in Scotland."

Meanwhile Mrs. Newsom, in the upper part of Mrs. Foyle's house, was, in Mrs. Preston's opinion, up to no good. She took great pride in telling us how she had thwarted that person's attempts to find out more about us.

"'Oh,' she says, 'I sometimes hear a piano, Mrs. Preston. Now I wonder if Mr. Faringdon ever gives music lessons? Do you think he'd teach my little girl?' 'No, madam,' I said, 'Mr. Faringdon wouldn't care to give music lessons. He lives quite independently.'"

But Mrs. Newsom wasn't so easily put off. "'Oh,

Mrs. Preston,' she said, 'I wonder if the Mr. Faringdons would come in to coffee one evening? Do you think, now, you could take a message to them?' 'No, madam,' I said. 'You can't send them an invitation by their own servant, madam. My gentlemen have never moved in circles where people do that sort of thing. And I must own, ma'am, it's my first experience of it myself.' "

We now rather expected a note from next door. But by all accounts from Mrs. Preston, Mrs. Newsom was kept busy by her nefarious activities. She seemed to intend to keep some sort of lodginghouse. In a church circle she had met Mrs. Heath, the French widow of a Fellow of one of the colleges, and it had occurred to them to combine forces and to take in young foreign students.

"I don't like to bother Mrs. Foyle about it, not really, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "She's not really quite herself yet, sir. But it's not right. I'm sure the contract doesn't allow Mrs. Newsom to take in lodgers."

We agreed that it was no use writing to Lady Elliot, who in any case might already have been suborned by Mrs. Newsom. We must simply allow Mrs. Newsom to take advantage of Mrs. Foyle's illness, much as we disliked the idea. Later on, if she or her lodgers gave any trouble, action could be taken—though it might then be a much more tiresome business.

After a few days we were invited in to coffee. Mrs. Newsom called one morning, and though Mrs. Preston did her best to bar the way, she insisted on interrupting Stephen's piano practice.

"We met over poor Mrs. Foyle," she unnecessarily reminded him. "Odd that we didn't see more of each other then, but I was so busy. Lady Elliot wrote quite delightfully about you and your brother. What a charming woman she must be!"

Mrs. Preston managed to be busy about the room throughout the interview.

"I am sorry, sir, you said you would go and see that person, sir," she said to Stephen after Mrs. Newsom's departure. "I don't think Mr. Andrew will care to go there with you. I doubt if your aunts, sir, would like me to let you associate with a person like that."

However we both went. The first preparation that the two partners had made against an influx of boarders was to set up in their hall a remarkably unpleasant oleograph of the Sacred Heart. A night light was burning in front of it, inside a small red lamp glass.

"Saint Marguerite Marie Alacoque say it keep peace in the house," explained Mrs. Heath, a voluble little person who opened the door to us. If this were so, it seemed a wise precaution to have placed it there.

"We like this flat so much," exclaimed Mrs. Newsom. "There's so much room!"

It was only about half again the size of ours, and we couldn't make out where she intended to put her numerous family as well as the lodgers. For these five bedrooms were intended, three of which were small attics.

"Mrs. Heath and I will sleep in the drawing room," said Mrs. Newsom. "I can't give the children rooms, poor devils. Veronica can come in with me. Francis

will sleep on the dining-room table—one can put in a leaf. (He isn't here much.) Or I'll put up a hammock for him; he'd love that. Charles shall have the settee in the hall, I think; and I'll put down a mattress on the floor somewhere for Joseph. Theresa can have a camp bed in the kitchen, or do you think the bathroom?"

"People might want to go there in the night," Mrs. Heath objected.

"Tiresome of them," said Mrs. Newsom. "I shall put two beds in each of the big bedrooms, of course," she ran on. They were not very big. "So you see we can easily take seven foreign students. Mrs. Heath has signed up several already. You will be sure to send us anyone you can, won't you?"

This gave me an excuse to ask what the terms would be.

"Oh, very reasonable," said Mrs. Newsom. "Four pounds ten a week, I think—or perhaps five for those who have bedrooms to themselves. I don't really think I ought to charge much more than that, do you?"

"That should be enough," I said, trying to keep all expression out of my voice.

Evidently I had succeeded. "There'll be extras of course," said Mrs. Newsom calmly. "That's where the profit comes in. And I thought it might be nice for the children to earn a little pocket money by talking to the foreigners. Charles or Joseph could take the boys on the river now and then, and Theresa could play tennis with the girls. At the same time they'd be improving their French, you see."

What we could not see was what the foreign students were going to get out of it all. However, that was hardly a question we could ask Mrs. Newsom.

"If I ever got the chance of an extra one, I suppose you wouldn't be able to put him up, would you?" she added hopefully. "I'd come to some arrangement with you, of course—say thirty bob a week?"

We received this suggestion very coldly indeed. We did not dare even to breathe a word of it to Mrs. Preston, it would have called forth such a storm of righteous anger.

When Mrs. Foyle was well enough to be told about Mrs. Newsom, and this was earlier than we expected, her sympathies were with her tenant. She thought it was snobbery on the part of Mrs. Preston to be so horrified at the goings-on upstairs.

"Poor woman, she has to make money for her children," she said.

The occasion, and the weakness of convalescence, unloosed her tongue. We heard far more than we had ever known before of her earlier struggles. Not only did we hear of the grueling hard work, and of the indignities borne for Miranda's sake, but also some of the sordid shifts of a lodginghouse keeper, indulged in for the same cause. If Miranda was now Lady Elliot, the mistress of Kellynch and a celebrated actress, it was because New Zealand mutton had been passed off on lodgers for Southdown, Danish eggs and butter substituted for English farm produce. It was because heat and light had been overcharged for, baths scored down to forgetful people who hadn't had them, serv-

ant girls had been underpaid. Mrs. Foyle was not penitent—for the same cause she would do it again, if it had to be done.

But then her voice did fall, she felt sure we should disapprove, though I think she hoped God would not mind so much. Once there had been—well, almost blackmail. After luncheon one day she had unexpectedly opened the bedroom door of an undergraduate—now vicar of a fashionable London church. This indiscretion had supplied her with a term's fees at St. Monica's, it had also paid for Miranda's degree (though she did not know it). After all, it had probably taught the young man a lesson, she said. And of course she hadn't extorted the money in any way—she would never have dreamt of denouncing him to the university authorities and perhaps spoiling his career. The hot, red-faced youth had pressed it upon her with shaking hands. He could well afford it, and she needed it so badly—was it a sin to take it? They always remained good friends—he knew how much she loved Miranda, a thing one could never tell Miranda herself. She had owed much to his sympathy, and was certain she still had his prayers. A pity he was so High Church; they would never be able to make him a bishop, except of somewhere heathenish like Zanzibar—and he would look so sweet in a miter.

Poor Mrs. Foyle—I wish I could mind this story as little as I think God probably does. Alas, I could excuse much more easily things that He appears to dislike so very much more. I am glad that she has Him for judge, and not Stephen and me—or Miranda. It

is a good thing that she has Father X's prayers, which ought to be very good ones. Stephen and I did what we could for her—we never mentioned it again, even between ourselves—we could not bear it.

13

ONE afternoon we found old Waterfield in a towering rage.

"The best-planned systems," he told us bitterly, "are not foolproof. I think I formerly explained to you my sleeping arrangements, designed, as you may remember, to obviate frequent washing of sheets, which is in itself expensive and wears out the fabric?"

"Yes," said Stephen.

"If I have explained it once to the skivvy," he said, "I have explained it no less than a hundred times. Even the simplest thing is difficult to get into an untrained mind."

What, we ask, had she done?

"She has had the impertinence to place a pair of sheets in the soiled-linen basket without my written permission," said Mr. Waterfield. "She left an illiterate note to explain her action." He paused. "It may not surprise you to learn," he continued, "that at my age one has not always complete control of one's bodily functions, and to make a long story short, I had what children call an 'accident.'"

"How tiresome for you," I said, avoiding Stephen's eye.

"Indeed, yes," he said. "But by far the most tiresome feature of the incident was the skivvy's behavior. But I have written her a stinging letter. I have used my powers of invective to the full—I have not spared her." He chuckled and rubbed his hands in the warmth of literary composition.

We bade him good-by, for we were on our way to visit Mrs. Foyle. For some time now she had been sufficiently recovered to go out, and today she had an engagement to go with us to see poor old Mrs. Barron. It was visiting day at the workhouse, and Mrs. Foyle had Mrs. Barron so much on her mind that she was determined to take the first opportunity to go. She had asked us to accompany her, feeling as yet too weak to undertake such an excursion without support.

"Mrs. Preston offered to come with me," she said, "but that would only have made Mrs. Barron madly jealous."

Mrs. Preston was now regularly working next door; by an adjustment of her timetable she had managed to find two or three hours daily for Mrs. Foyle.

"How I loathe institutions of any sort!" said Mrs. Foyle. "Oh, my Lord, how well I understand the horror working-class people have of 'the House!' How lucky we are not to have that danger in front of us!"

I wondered if it had not been a real danger in the days when Mrs. Foyle took in lodgers—if fears for herself had not blended with hopes for Miranda in those sordid and scraping days. Even more pardonable, then, to have seized the money held out by that indiscreet

young man who was studying for Holy Orders. . . . I began dimly to realize the extraordinary relief and triumph that Miranda's grand marriage must have been. For herself it was the crown of her social and dramatic career, and for her mother a final insurance against want and "the House."

"It's so sad when old people like Mrs. Barron have no one to care for them," she said. "Oh, how I thank God for Miranda!"

We hoped Miranda was a proper subject for thankfulness—and surely she must be. We strongly suspected that she did not do as much as she should for her mother, and that the memory of those lodging-house days filled her more with repulsion than with gratitude—of course she was only human, and lodging-houses do smell of the most distressing things in English cookery, and those are smells that do not grow fainter or sweeter in the recollection. We also had an idea that Peter, who lavished money on his theatrical productions, was not very generous with it elsewhere. Nevertheless, if Miranda were a human being, and had been suckled by Mrs. Foyle and not by Hyrcanian tigers, being married as she was to a man with Peter Elliot's annual turnover she would surely guarantee that her mother ended her days in her own house, or in an expensive nursing home. The shadows of "the House" need not darken her life.

All the same she shuddered as we approached the large, muddy-gray building, which stood a little outside Christminster—even though the car stood waiting that was to take us back, and Mrs. Preston was pur-

posely staying on extra time in Mrs. Foyle's house to give us a cup of tea on our return.

We rang a bell, and waited.

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here," quoted Mrs. Foyle dismally. "Oh, my Lord, I hope the poor old thing isn't too unhappy!"

We had a little time to wait, and to grow more nervous.

"One's almost ashamed to visit anyone here," said Mrs. Foyle. "In prison or hospital it's different; you can't get them out and take them home. But here you could, if you wanted to. Oh, my Lord, I don't know what I'd say to anyone who had the hypocrisy to visit me in a place like this, but wouldn't take me out of it!"

"You mustn't say that," said Stephen. "You know you couldn't possibly have her back."

Mrs. Foyle shook her head obstinately.

"Visitors for Barron?" asked someone at the office. "In the mental ward, to the right, please."

It was a shock. All the same, it was too valuable a debating point to be lost. "There you are, you see," said Stephen. "You couldn't have her out."

"She's probably gone mental here," whispered Mrs. Foyle. "I know I should."

Never have I seen such extreme gloom and fear on a human face. Mrs. Foyle, a little person at any time, was looking tiny—as if shrunk to half her normal size in the great echoing passages of "the House."

"Someone to see you, Barron," said the nurse, with a kind enough roughness.

Mrs. Barron sat up in bed, a little rat's tail of hair

hung down at the back of her head, and her eyes were staring, like those of a small girl who has been crying.

"I don't want to see no one," she said.

"It's Mrs. Foyle, who was so kind to you," said the nurse encouragingly. "And two young gentlemen."

"So she's brought 'er chaps," said Mrs. Barron, with a momentary return to her old self. "Tee, hee!" Then gloom reasserted its sway. "I'm ashamed for anyone to see me in this 'ouse," she said.

"Oh, come," said the nurse briskly, "you're very lucky to be here in the infirmary. You've got us to look after you, and no more worries. There are times when I wouldn't mind changing places with you, I can tell you."

"It's a bad 'ouse," said Mrs. Barron.

"Look, I've brought you some nice oranges," said Mrs. Foyle. "And some biscuits. Shall I ask someone to put them in your locker for you?"

"Don't give them to that young woman, or I'll never see 'em again," said Mrs. Barron ungraciously. "Let me 'ave them 'ere, under me pillow."

"I hope you get good food here," said Mrs. Foyle, rather fussily. "You ought to have plenty of fresh milk every day."

"Filthy rubbidge, I can't touch it," said Mrs. Barron—probably replying to the first part of the question.

"I expect you like having company," said Mrs. Foyle, desperately trying to find some advantage in workhouse life. "There's always someone here for you to talk to."

"Sometimes I don't talk for days and days," said Mrs. Barron morosely.

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Foyle.

There was an awkward pause, by which Mrs. Barron alone seemed quite unembarrassed. I almost thought one of her silent periods must be beginning, but her voice suddenly rang out in indignation: "They've put me next to a madwoman, they 'ave! Violent, she is, too!"

We looked in some alarm at a calm, old, sleeping face in the next bed, and looked away again. Mrs. Foyle tried to change the subject.

"What's that building you see through the window?" she asked.

"It's where they cut them up," said Mrs. Barron savagely. "And yet you can't 'ang them."

"It's like going away and leaving someone in the grave," said Mrs. Foyle, as we went out of the building. "Only it's worse."

I hope indeed it is not so bad for those in the grave. But horrified as I was at the hopeless misery in which Mrs. Barron was to prepare for eternity, I wished to make as little of it as I could. Mrs. Barron had fallen into the melancholy, evil days of old age, when the clouds return after rain. When life has grown as black as that, no sun will brighten it again in this world. Mrs. Foyle had no power to make things any better for her; she could only torment herself uselessly about the poor old woman.

"I think the nurses are kind," I said.

"The one with us seemed quite a nice girl," said Stephen.

"All nurses are fiends," said Mrs. Foyle, with the desperate certainty of a treatise on formal logic stating the first term of a syllogism.

"My husband went off with a nurse," she told us, when we were back in the taxi. Either she had forgotten the legend of the pirate captain's death at sea, or she no longer cared to keep it up. "Oh, my Lord, how he paid for it afterwards!" she said.

A henpecked life, I suppose, at Chislehurst.

"He always was a *silly* little man!" said his widow vindictively.

There was the end of a legend, the second death of a hero. And yet I still believe, and on still uncontroverted testimony, that he used to throw knives at her. Perhaps not many knives, and perhaps they were stainless and not very sharp. At all events, I am quite sure that he drank.

Mrs. Preston eagerly welcomed us in, longing for news.

"Well, poor Mrs. Barron!" she said. "I'm sorry for her, really, ma'am. But you couldn't have her back here, not possibly, madam, being how she is."

"Oh, dear, it's a shame when people aren't wanted by anyone," said Mrs. Foyle in a tone which momentarily made Stephen and me feel quite self-reproachful, because we did not at all want Mrs. Barron—as indeed why should we?

Mrs. Preston was made of much sterner stuff. "If she had any family, ma'am, it would be a great dis-

grace to them to let her go to the workhouse," she said. "As it is, it's the only thing, ma'am."

From time to time Mrs. Foyle continued to lament Mrs. Barron in her living grave, and sometimes she brought offerings of fruit and biscuits thither to appease that troubled spirit. She generally was prudent enough to hand them over to someone in authority, on a day when visitors were not admitted.

Meanwhile the world went, as it heartlessly does, on. There were few of the forty days and nights of Lent left, and of those that remained one felt one should make the most. Mr. Waterfield was certainly doing his best, he was frequently to be seen on his bicycle between the house and the church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas.

"The date of Easter should be fixed once for all," he said to us. "I should prefer it to fall during Full Term. In the absence of the undergraduates, they are hard put to it to find sufficient acrobats—I should say acolytes—for the Holy Week offices at Polly and Nick."

Old Waterfield's first term, though a piece of facetiousness, was not ill-chosen. They went in for the "English usage" at St. Mary and St. Nicholas, which meant that young men in rather tight-appareled albs had to perform some very strange antics.

"Nowadays," continued Mr. Waterfield, "it is the fashion to speak of them not as acolytes but 'servers'—I shall never get used to the word. Some fifty or sixty years ago there used to be a thurifer at All Saints', Margaret Street—he excited my amorous propensities. I once addressed a sonnet to him, beginning: *Fair*

thurifer, exquisite acolyte . . . A beautiful phrase, *exquisite acolyte*. Now I could not have said *exquisite server*, you know."

"You could not," we agreed.

"But to return to the date of Easter," said Mr. Waterfield. "I propose to devote most of my remaining energies to its stabilization. I feel I may be a real benefactor to Western Europe—and if the Greeks will only come in on my plan, I shall have done much to heal the schism between East and West."

We ran into Mrs. Newsom with a few young Newsoms. "I'm just dashing along to the Sacred Heart for a little *Tenebrae*," she said. "I hope some of the children will sit it out—it will keep them out of the house for an hour or two."

Some of her lodgers had arrived, and everything was at sixes and sevens.

"I never remember such a hectic Holy Week!" she exclaimed. "Good-by, darlings!"

We did not know that we knew Mrs. Newsom well enough to be so addressed, and I felt sure that Mrs. Preston would not like it at all.

"Charles Newsom is a nice-looking boy," said old Waterfield, before they were out of earshot. "And he is not at all badly mannered for a Roman Catholic."

We ourselves had not yet learnt to tell one Newsom from another. We found, however, that Mrs. Preston was at least as well up in them as Mr. Waterfield.

"Charles, from next door," she announced to Stephen next morning while he was at his piano.

"Mummy wondered if Veronica could sometimes use your garden," he asked. "Now we've got lodgers it's difficult to find time to take her to the park."

Stephen was very sympathetic, agreed that Mrs. Foyle's garden was too cluttered up with sheds to make a very good playground, but regretted that the garden of our house did not belong to us, but to Mr. Waterfield. Charles managed to cajole him into promising to interview old Waterfield on the subject—when I came back home that afternoon I was horrified at the rashness of his undertaking, but I consented to go with him.

Mr. Waterfield stood in his door to receive our proposals, and he did not receive them at all well.

"There is the park," he said laconically, in answer to our request.

"The child is too young to go there alone," said Stephen.

"She will grow older," said Mr. Waterfield.

"If you would allow her to use your garden in the meantime, it would be a great help to them," said Stephen.

"To *them*?" exclaimed old Waterfield quickly, with a look of alarm and distaste.

"They would not then have to take her to the park," Stephen explained patiently.

"I am afraid that she might in some way upset my gardener, the mild Mr. Telfer," said Mr. Waterfield. "I should much prefer to put the whole question aside for consideration later. I have a great deal of work that must be done before the library closes for its Easter

recess—and then, there are one's additional devotions."

We went next door to report our ill-success. Charles and Francis were out, exercising the lodgers in some of the college gardens.

"Veronica, darling, you shall write to him," said Mrs. Newsom. "Tell him you need fresh air." Perhaps she thought Mr. Waterfield could hardly resist the scrawl of a child of seven—proud as they are of their maternity, mothers often forget that everyone is not a mother.

"Do you think if I said I was Charles's sister, it would be better?" said Veronica knowingly. "He likes Charles the best of us."

The unnatural child was sitting down quite happily to write—a thing nice children generally have to be dragged by wild horses to do. Stephen and I were horrified.

"Charles shall deliver your note, darling," said Mrs. Newsom.

"He'd better put on his best suit, that would make a good impression," said Theresa. "And I'll see if I can make him brush his hair."

Stephen dictated a note to Veronica: "Miss Veronica Newsom presents her compliments to Mr. Waterfield, and would be most grateful for permission to use his garden sometimes in the early afternoon."

"She *does* need fresh air," added Veronica, of her own accord.

"Very nice, darling," said her mother. "Charles shall take it."

"He must put on his best suit and brush his hair," said Veronica. "We want him to look his best for Mr. Waterfield."

The next thing Stephen and I knew about the negotiations over the garden, was a violent ring at our bell. Mrs. Newsom stood at the door with Veronica.

"Charles has been *hours* with Mr. Waterfield," said Mrs. Newsom anxiously. "I hope it was really all right to send him."

"He put on his best suit and brushed his hair," said Veronica, who was enjoying her mother's anxiety.

"Come and look at them out of our window," said Stephen soothingly.

Charles and Mr. Waterfield were walking quietly up and down, for all the world like Adam and the Almighty in the Garden of Eden.

It was not a surprise to learn that Veronica's right of entry had been granted.

"What on earth were you talking about?" Mrs. Newsom asked.

"The restoration of the Hapsburgs," said Charles, "and the date of Easter."

14

IN early summer, at a moment of intense international crisis, we found Cyprian having tea with Mrs. Foyle. He came home with us afterwards, accepting an invitation which we had only issued because we felt sure it would be declined. But he was nervous, and wanted to talk.

"God! How can you sit there making small talk with that old woman in times like these?" he said nastily.

"Why were you with her, then," I inquired, "since you find it so absurd?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Cyprian. "I suppose one has social duties."

"I don't think it's so much a duty to go to see people, as to be nice to them when one has gone," said Stephen pointedly.

"Oh, I don't mean Mrs. Foyle," said Cyprian impatiently. "I don't see that one has much duty to her. Her life's over, anyway. But Miranda will expect me to report on her—she knows I'm here for the week end."

"In these times, Mrs. Foyle's expectation of life may be as good as yours or mine," I said. "If not better."

"I can't bear it," said Cyprian suddenly. "War—I can't bear it."

"In your profession, one can surely take an engagement in America," said Stephen spitefully. "Go on the films."

"The Americans will be in it up to the hilt this time," said Cyprian. "There's no way out that way—Oh, God, if there was only a way out!"

"At least one can refuse to take any part in the business of killing people," I said.

Cyprian said gloomily that it was being killed that he objected to, and that all pacifists were certain to be shot on the first day of war—he had been "told," it was part of "the plan."

"Well, perhaps that would be the best day to be shot," I said.

"You and Stephen may have no object in living," said Cyprian. "But I have my Art—and I like life."

"Why don't you become a clergyman?" said Stephen sensibly. "Then you can't be called up and can safely be as fire-eating as you like, at a distance."

"That odd bishop you once went to tea with ordained you a deacon, didn't he?" I put in. "But perhaps it doesn't count."

Cyprian didn't like the idea. The Church, he said, had disgraced herself enough in the last war, and all clergy would certainly be lynched after the next.

"There was a Dane who had a series of operations to make himself into a woman," I said thoughtfully. "How would you like that? You could be Miranda's understudy."

"Don't be funny," said Cyprian. He went on solemnly: "That man died as a result of one of those operations, anyway. And this time women will be called up just like men, so it wouldn't help. Besides, I don't know how Miranda would take it. . . ."

Vanity is not cast out by fear. I think Cyprian wanted us to imagine that it was of some interest to Miranda whether he was a man or a woman. I am sure she didn't care, I don't see how anyone could.

"You might get certified," said Stephen helpfully.

"What will be the use, when the whole world's a madhouse?" said Cyprian, with a good deal of justice.

"I should like to put my eyes out," he said seriously. "It would save me from seeing a lot of horrible things. But for my Art, I would. Instead, I mean to have a hand off."

Perhaps, then, he had gained at least this happy idea by calling on Mrs. Foyle.

"How will you manage on the stage?" I asked.

"Sarah Bernhardt had a wooden leg," said Cyprian, so I felt answered.

"It would be simpler to shoot yourself straight away," said Stephen.

He was bitterly reproached for lack of sympathy—and yet I suppose it never occurred to Cyprian that Stephen and I would be exposed to the same dangers as himself if war came, and that we had as much to lose as he, and more. To rate our altruism at the lowest—and very much lower than I think it ought to be rated—each of us must care about the safety of at least

one other person beside himself. It is most unlikely that the same could be said of Cyprian.

He went away, and Stephen thankfully put some Bach on the gramophone.

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly? The answer in my own case, and, I am convinced in that of many other people who would be loath to admit it, is that we are not musical enough. On a bad day, all the themes of anguish go through a fugal development in my head; if I were more sensitive to the music they wouldn't, for my head would be otherwise occupied. Stephen, no less sensitive than I to the misery of the day, was at peace. Gradually his peace spread over the room and enclosed me, and then I could listen to the music. As bad days often do, the day ended well.

Nowadays the mornings were the worst time.

New every morning is the hate
Our wakening and uprising meet:
From sleep and darkness rudely brought,
Restored to life, and pain, and thought.

I hoped Stephen would have a comforting chat with Mrs. Preston about Mrs. Tanqueray, whose woes were mostly old, unhappy, far-off things, like the sorrows of Deirdre, or the troubles of Mrs. Halliburton. For my own part, I was lucky in finding a slight diversion in the library. I went to talk to an assistant, who was sitting on the (now cold) waterpipes, a habit he had no doubt acquired during the bitter winter months when there is sometimes a little warmth in them. Assistants are the best people to talk to—one runs less

risk of being reproved for talking, and they are generally willing to spare the time, for it is not their own, but the library's.

"We received a letter from the Almighty today," he said.

"Did it fall down from Heaven?"

"No, it came by the common post," he said. "Not even by air mail, as you might expect. He wrote from Zürich, from an address in Winterthürerstrasse."

"In German, I suppose; or is God a Frenchman?"

"In very bad English," said the assistant. "I think He is a German-Swiss."

"What had He to say?" I asked.

"Like most other people, He wanted us to buy something," said the assistant. "He sent us an advertisement of a forthcoming work of His called *The Thunder Book*. I will show you His letter, if you like."

"It is my groundless love," wrote the Almighty, whose command of the English language was decidedly limited, "which push me to advertise my *Donnerbuch*." Like many other authors He appeared to cherish His last born above all the rest of His literary progeny. Those who read it and translated it into other languages (for it was to come out in German) would be richly rewarded. Those who mocked at it were threatened with the fate of Corah, Dathan and Abiathar. This penalty was risked, I fear, by the assistant and myself—but as an equally disastrous fate seemed to menace the whole world, one was tempted to take particular judgments lightly.

The prevalent gloom hung heavily over Mrs. Foyle. Cyprian and people of his sort might have thought that she lived in a world of her own and hardly noticed what went on in the macrocosm. If you pointed out their error to them, they would no doubt have said that what went on in the outside world could not matter to her a great deal. She had had her life. Moreover she had no sons to be hostages to Mars—only a daughter. Miranda was not at all likely to be a victim of any future war. But people like Cyprian know so very little about human nature, that it does not much matter what they think.

Mrs. Foyle, on the other hand, was far from knowing all about herself. I have little doubt but that she thought her anxiety about the fate of the world a great deal more altruistic than it really was. It is true that she was anxious about the fate of her country—she was ardently patriotic—about Peter's future, about all the poor boys one saw who were trying to pursue their studies at Christminster in these dreadful days—anyone with a heart must feel for them. But I am also sure that she greatly underrated her personal, physical fear. I am sure that, more than she would have admitted, she had a dread of bombs bursting over Christminster, of fire running from house to house, of guns fired from the air on its panic-stricken inhabitants, and, worst of all, of the choking, nightmare horror of poison gas. In those days many people had a vivid mental picture of war—and it was rather more terrifying than the cruelest medieval or puritan no-

tions of Hell. We felt as Cowper felt when he was sure he was damned.

But more than all that, I think she had a disinterested misery, cultivated for its own sake. It was not the whole story to say that she was frightened for her own skin, or anxious for that of other people. She had entered into the miasma of fear and pain and hatred that was choking the world, until it was the air that she breathed all day. No doubt that was, in part, the experience of all of us—how odd it is to read novels in which the war came as a sudden shock to people. But Stephen and I, for instance, and even Cyprian, were still of an age *while the sun, or the light, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain*—for Stephen there was Bach, for me books, for Cyprian the theater and its gossip. But for Mrs. Foyle the clouds returned. The evil days were there, and the years when she could take no pleasure in them. Mr. Waterfield enjoyed a perpetual youth, when the evil days came not. But Mrs. Foyle, like Mrs. Barron, had entered after her threescore years and ten into the years of labor and sorrow. Life, in all these years, had become a habit, and it was a habit she could probably not even imagine herself as being cured of; but it was a habit that gave her very little pleasure.

I often came back from the library to find Stephen stretched out wearily in his chair, with his feet up on a stool.

"So, you have had to put your feet up?" I said.

"I'm exhausted," he answered. "I have just been in

next door for a quarter of an hour. Poor old Foyle is intensely depressing today."

"Virtue went out of you?"

"Yes," he groaned. "But it didn't seem to do her any good."

Now and then I would go in for a short visit myself, though I am far less unselfish than Stephen about that sort of thing.

"I can't bear it today," I would complain, after tea.

"You'll say that tomorrow," said Stephen patiently, "and the next day. Make an effort to go now, and get it over."

"It doesn't seem to make much difference," I would grumble. "She is intensely depressed all the time one is there."

"You know it makes a difference," said Stephen. "You know how miserable she was last time we went away for a week."

Of course he was perfectly right. Mrs. Foyle showed little pleasure at our coming, she even craftily dissembled, and pretended that she was busy and that we had disturbed her. But she held on to us at the end of every visit. If our visits became rare, she would be cross and reproachful—though she never exceeded her statutory right to visit us once a week on Sundays after tea. She had the hungry need for us that the old sometimes have for the young—it is as urgent as the need that lovers have for each other, or rather as that need that the lover who kisses has for the other who only holds out a cheek, and suffers it to be kissed.

When I went in at the open door I might catch Mrs. Foyle sitting down hurriedly. She had been pacing about restlessly before I came.

"Oh, my Lord, the world's in a dreadful state!" was likely to be her opening remark. Or: "The news seems even worse today."

She was impatient of any comforting thought one might offer her—and we did not hesitate to offer very spurious scraps of comfort that would not have been any good to ourselves. If we had had anything better, we would have given it. But I hope the grains of comfort we sowed on this stony ground now and then sprang up into momentary life, even if they quickly withered away. "Andrew said this," or "Stephen said that," she might write in her letter to Miranda. I do not know, but I believe that she still tried to keep up her courage when writing to her daughter, and to put the best face on things she could. People of her generation, I have noticed, maintain a certain stoicism when they are writing which I admire. I have often proposed this as an example to some of my contemporaries, like Cyprian, who could (if they had the self-knowledge) truthfully say with the seventeenth-century poet:

My pen's the spout

Where the rain-water of mine eyes runs out.

Even though Mrs. Foyle was not quite a lady, she had probably enough breeding and self-discipline to prevent her from letting herself go on paper.

But any cheering remark was promptly received with contempt. It was a fine day—well, what was the use? A good play was soon coming to the theater—but one was in no mood for playgoing, one couldn't understand how people cared for that sort of thing in these times. The garden was looking nice—just as well, for it was probably the last summer one would be able to grow flowers; every inch would be needed for vegetables when the war was here, or one might have to dig an air-raid shelter.

"It's no use taking any interest in anything," was the perpetual, doleful refrain.

The germs of gloom were so thick in the air at Mrs. Foyle's, that it was impossible not to be infected. On leaving her, Stephen and I regularly gave our minds an antiseptic bath; for him a few records of Haydn, Handel or Bach, for me a few chapters of Jane Austen. And yet it was evident that Mrs. Foyle was very well satisfied with herself for indulging in this poisonous worry, and for exposing other people to the infection. She thought people who lived differently, like old Waterfield, were superficial and selfish. Even obviously useful and unselfish people like Mrs. Preston were held by her to have only a humble vocation in the world, as Marthas. She believed that in electing the contemplative life of worry she had chosen the better part. Well, no one could possibly wish to take it away from her. I am sure that it had never occurred to her that, if one is going to be a Mary, there is an obligation to pray.

It did not make things any better when news came

that old Mrs. Barron had died in the workhouse. She had slipped quietly out of life, without any of the last-breath denunciations of the place that she would probably have liked to make. The matron wrote to Mrs. Foyle that all was, no doubt, for the best, and that Mrs. Barron had had every possible attention, and that she was now at rest.

"They've killed her at that place," said Mrs. Foyle. "I knew they would. Of course I ought to have had her out again at all costs."

"If she was going to die, she would have died in your house," said Stephen. "It's much easier for everyone, her dying in the infirmary."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Foyle gloomily. "Poor old soul—she might not have died if she'd stayed here. You can't be certain."

"As you can't be certain, it's no good worrying," I said. "There are only too many real worries, without thinking about might-have-beens."

"That's a selfish, modern way of looking at things," said Mrs. Foyle crossly.

I was surprised and grieved at her choice of adjective; it showed that she indeed felt herself old. Although she thought people of her own generation had more energy, yet in all other things she claimed to be far more modern than Stephen and myself—and though I do not quite understand the word, I should hazard a guess that she probably was. I am sure that the values of Kellynch were "modern values," whatever these may be.

"I don't think it's very unselfish to worry," I said

as gently as I could. "It doesn't help anyone else, you know."

"Well, one doesn't worry for oneself," said Mrs. Foyle self-righteously, and not, I think, with perfect truth.

After our laborious attempts to bolster up Mrs. Foyle's morale, it was extremely annoying when Mary Tucker ran in on a hurried visit and undid nearly all our good work.

"My dears, it's tragic old Mrs. Barron dying," she exclaimed. "But you might have known it would happen at once. They can't be bothered with old people there, and just kill them off quickly by neglect or ill-treatment. Everyone calls it the slaughterhouse; it's murder to send anyone in there. When one of Tommy's parishioners goes in, the next thing he has to do is to bury him. There's seldom any time to visit him there first. There was old Waddilove last week, and poor Miss Pym the week before—let me see, who came before that?"

We encouraged Mary to run on, hoping that she would become so outrageous that Mrs. Foyle would laugh at her. But we had an uncomfortable feeling that Mrs. Foyle had laughed her last some time ago.

We could not directly approach Miranda and, after discussion, we decided against asking Cyprian to appeal to her to come. Instead we asked Mrs. Preston what she thought could be done for Mrs. Foyle.

"Well, sir, when people once get like that, it's very difficult, sir," she admitted. "Mrs. Tanqueray's mother got like that at the end, sir, and there wasn't anything

we could do for her—not really. I said one thing, and I said another—but all she would say was: ‘Nothing’s any good, Emily. You must never let yourself care for anything.’ ”

Mrs. Tanqueray’s mother had, however, and very understandably, preferred Mrs. Preston’s company to that of other people. We wondered if she couldn’t rouse Mrs. Foyle.

“Well, in some ways, sir, it would be easier,” she said. “There are things I could say to her that I could hardly say to a real lady, you know. Oh yes, in some ways it would be easier to rouse Mrs. Foyle.”

I think she must have tackled her very vigorously and robustly, and very kindly. The first success we heard of was that Mrs. Foyle had invited her to go with her to the cinema once a week.

“‘Do you care for the pictures?’ she said. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘no, ma’am, not really. But once in a way I don’t mind. What I like is a good play, madam.’ ”

I fancy that Mrs. Preston thought the cinema rather a common diversion, but if she thought so, she may have thought it all the better suited to Mrs. Foyle. They took to going regularly on Thursdays, and in the fantastic life of American gunmen Mrs. Foyle seemed temporarily to forget the gunfire that threatened Europe. In moments of excitement I am sure she clung to Mrs. Preston’s hand. In a life so shorn of personal relations, and so empty as Mrs. Foyle’s now was, even a single weekly event to which she could look forward was a thing of importance. She liked telling us: “Tomorrow is Thursday, so I shall be out, of

course." She even remarked how quickly Thursdays seemed to come round—not being a regular church-goer, she felt the benefit of a weekly rite all the more. The Thursdays of her life, threaded together on a string, seemed to bind it together and make it more purposeful. She got through the rest of the summer far more happily.

"Doesn't poor Mrs. Foyle depress you a lot at times?" we asked Mrs. Preston, who did not indeed look depressed.

"I shouldn't think of letting her," answered Mrs. Preston with vigor.

15

STEPHEN and I went away early that year for our summer holiday. When we came back to Christminster, refreshed by Mediterranean sun, and by abstention from reading the newspapers, Mrs. Foyle was still at Kellynch. She sent us a picture post card of it, and it certainly looked impressive. She enumerated some of her fellow guests, and their names impressed us less—we could conjecture what the party must be like.

In these days, when the outside world was rushing faster and faster to its ruin, we clung a little despairingly to the rather quaint world of Miss Poole and her circle. We felt we might as well affirm our detestation of war to the last, even though it might be to odd little people, in odd little places. One of the oddest was a conventicle of some sort at Steeple Crampton, where some of us were invited to speak in a debate.

We had no sooner taken our places than a strange person who looked like (and no doubt was) a dissenting minister, his upper lip covered with sticking plaster, rose and gave out a hymn, in a voice modified by this impediment: "Peace, perfect peace. . . ."

We had hardly sat down after this very strange hymn

singing, when he was up again, like a Jack-in-the-box.

"We have a long program before us this evening," he said. "So we had better push on—with all due reverence."

Two girls from Denton Prior, I should think the schoolmistress and her friend, had kindly bicycled over to sing a duet. It was about Love, and though the words were not audible, their expressions indicated that they were celebrating the Sacred rather than the Profane variety. Their accents showed that they came of a social class inferior to that of Cyprian's fiancée from their village—they were much too "refined." And they were not always in tune.

"Well," said the minister, "we expect something sweet from Denton, and we always get it." And he pushed on, with all due reverence.

A male quartet from Ashworth St. John had to sing before the debate could begin. They were very bass and shy, and reminded me of our own dumb ox.

"How fantastic rural England is!" I whispered to Stephen.

The debate itself offered no surprises. Each side flung triumphantly at the other the familiar arguments about war and peace.

"What would you do if you saw a German assaulting your sister?" said the villagers of Crampton.

"I shouldn't drop a bomb on his uncle," answered the visitors from Christminster.

Everyone was very pleased with himself, no one was shaken or even touched by anything said by anyone else. And so it must always be.

I began to imagine what an air raid might be like in that hall: probably we should have to put out most of the evil smelling oil lamps, and lower the others. A siren would scream out in the village. We should have to stay where we were till it was over; if necessary, we should have to die there. Perhaps the last face I should see on earth would be that of the minister, with his stuck-up lip. I wondered how we should all like it—if we should behave well, or if the male quartet would force their way out, trampling down the school-mistress and her friend. It occurred to me that it would be no bad thing for other people to share my meditation. I got up, and invited them to imagine the scene. As I naturally could not refer to the minister's upper lip, I had to drag in more conventional horrors out of the books we used to read at that time.

Finally the minister rose, like a judge, and said that he was going to sum up the debate. He informed us that he had awarded marks to the different speakers for their material, their expression of it and their delivery. Stephen and I were astonished to hear him inform us that such was the invariable practice of university debating societies. We wondered (and if it was snobbish of us, I really do not care) what university he had adorned. On this count, the pacifists from Christminster, he did not hesitate to say, had lost the debate—and the victory was (should he say?) to the *truer* pacifists, the more real and more realistic peace-makers of Crampton. One of the last speakers (Mr. Faringdon was, he believed, the name) had lost a lot of marks on his subject matter, though it had been well

expressed, and the delivery was not bad, if a little too emphatic.

"The impertinence!" whispered Stephen.

Mr. Faringdon had tried, continued the minister, to bludgeon the people of Crampton into peace at any price. Now Crampton was not to be frightened. . . . And the minister then, with a slight change of voice, wound up the meeting with a prayer.

In Mrs. Foyle's absence the Newsom household had spread over her garden, as well as Mr. Waterfield's. Mrs. Heath had taken to doing the washing for the family and their lodgers, and hung it up to dry in the garden. She did it in rather a hole-and-corner way, not wishing the neighborhood to know that she practiced so inelegant an economy. She tried to conceal it among Mrs. Foyle's sheds—did she suppose that none of us ever looked out of our upstairs windows? Mrs. Preston looked out of ours, and enjoyed a bird's-eye view. She shook a duster viciously in the direction of next door, and gave thanks that Mrs. Tanqueray's mother had not been spared to see how the Woodbury road had gone down since her day. If it had come to washing in the gardens, all standards had collapsed.

Mrs. Preston was very often at the window these days watching Mrs. Heath scurry about, attended by an overworked and feeble-minded servant girl. Like most people, she could not keep her eyes off the things that most annoyed her. Now and then a swirl of wind flung the washing against the sheds and dirtied it.

Mrs. Preston turned from the window, and with

obvious pleasure announced the fact to Stephen at his piano. "I heard a bit of French then!" she said.

"I shall have a word with Mrs. Foyle when she comes back, sir," she continued. "Mrs. Newsom has to be told she mustn't carry on like this, sir."

Stephen observed that it was Mrs. Heath who was doing the washing.

"She wouldn't have done it, sir, not without Mrs. Newsom's instigation," said Mrs. Preston, who disliked Mrs. Heath much less than her partner. "That woman's a London slum in herself, sir. It's dreadful for you having a person like that next door, sir, and having to see her goings-on from your windows. Fancy a view like that for Mrs. Tanqueray's mother!"

But when Mrs. Foyle returned, she seemed to have no heart for stories about Mrs. Newsom. With difficulty, almost as to a duty, she went back to her Thursday outings to the cinema—she no longer looked forward to them. She had not even the interest and the energy left to mourn over the fate of Europe, which then appeared to be at its last gasp.

"I don't care what happens now," she said. "I don't take any more interest."

There was a note of reproach in the last remark. We felt, and we were probably meant to feel, that it was because the world had behaved so badly to Mrs. Foyle that, as a punishment, she proposed to take no more interest in its doings. And it had indeed behaved to her as cruelly as it could—she had quarreled seriously with Miranda. This much we were allowed to know from hints that she dropped.

"If you only knew—but I couldn't tell anyone," sometimes came out, or: "Perhaps you'll know some day." There were little, shy, tentative advances, signs that she wanted to be questioned and to have her trouble dragged out of her—but if we followed them up, she would change her mind and choke us off. She wanted to talk, and she couldn't talk. I am afraid that in these days she seldom sat still, but paced round and round that little drawing room full of photographs of Miranda.

We should have felt even more sorry for her than we did, but for the fact that so agonizing an international crisis was then torturing everyone else, that one could almost envy a person so wrapped up in a private grief as to be completely impervious to the general pain. Even if it had been possible, we should have hesitated to rouse her then. For if she were lightened of her own trouble, the consequence would be that she would be exposed to sharing in that of the world, which was equally distressing. Moreover we need all our nervous strength to live through those days and keep our tempers—we did not feel inclined to waste it fruitlessly on Mrs. Foyle.

Mrs. Preston told us, robustly, that she wasn't going to let the news put her out; she expressed great contempt for Mrs. Newsom, who had burst into tears in front of her servant the day before.

"But of course, sir, lack of breeding does tell," she said. "She and Mrs. Heath, sir, they've been very what Mrs. Tanqueray's mother used to call *flyabostic* these days."

When I next ran into her, I thought how well Mrs. Tanqueray's mother's adjective fitted Mrs. Newsom. She looked extremely *flyabostic*.

"Mrs. Heath and I are doing one novena after another," she panted out breathlessly. "We've just finished one to the Little Flower; who do you think we should try next? I thought of St. Thomas More, but for some reason Mrs. Heath seems against him and wants St. Joan. But perhaps you've some other suggestion?"

I had—the patron of lost causes. "Try St. Jude," I said dismally.

"Oh, my dear, d'you think it's as bad as all that?" said Mrs. Newsom, blenching.

"Worse," I said.

"No, I don't think we'll have recourse to St. Jude quite yet," said Mrs. Newsom, in a brisk tone. "We might do Our Lady of Lourdes next; that ought to suit Mrs. Heath."

Meanwhile a number of idiot children had been evacuated from London to a village near Christminster, their safety apparently being considered a matter of the first importance. Some of them were lodged in a cottage near a bombing-ground, and the R.A.F. inadvertently dropped a bomb on them. This was one of the more brutal humors of those unhappy days. I suppose in a less squeamish age people would have thought it very funny; the incident had everything in it to make Shakespeare laugh. But to overcivilized Christminster it was ineffective as comic relief.

Undeterred by this contretemps, Mrs. Heath and

Mrs. Newsom had decided to move their own household into the country if the worst came to the worst. They had inside information that Christminster was to be utterly destroyed. It was part of "the plan."

"They didn't touch it in the last war," Stephen objected.

"Too many German officers were Christminster men, in the Junker days," said Mrs. Newsom. "They'll be a very different class this time."

Mrs. Heath was chiefly annoyed at the uncertainty: it left her powerless to plan, and she wanted their flight to fit in with washing day, and to have all their provisions in order. The shilly-shallying of all the governments concerned distracted her—much better if they had their war, and got it over.

"I give them till Tuesday," she said emphatically. And what she would have done had they gone on dithering much longer, one hardly likes to imagine. Fortunately Mr. Chamberlain flew to Munich, and she was not put to the test.

The short memories people have are perhaps convenient to themselves, but they are annoying to those who forget things less easily. It was not indeed a peace that lasted our time (except for a happy few, whose time it lasted). It may not have been a peace with honor. We all had our misgivings very soon, and some had them from the first. But, talking to people some time after the event, you would suppose they had been quite untouched by the wave of joy that (I observed) swept over Christminster, and that (I suspect) spared few places in Europe. It was a day when, if we had been

people to kiss in the street, then we should have kissed in the street—even in the Woodbury road, or in Barnicot square. We did depart so far from custom as to shake hands. I heard a telegraph boy whistling, as I greeted Mrs. Heath, and it was the Hymn to Joy from the Choral Symphony—we are so cultivated in Christminster. And the bells of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, of the cathedral, and of the university church peeled for a solemn *Te Deum*. For many people it was the happiest day in their lives.

"The young gentlemen will be coming back again," said the Christminster landladies and tradespeople—and they said it with affection, not only with relief that their businesses would not be interrupted. And a little later the feet of the young gentlemen were again to be heard on our pavements. Some of them were to be seen in our part of the town on Sunday afternoons—the familiar world of blue serge suits, chintz chair covers, hot scones and Dresden china still went on. One liked to think of it going on, even though one had no wish to be a party of it.

Stephen and I, less neatly dressed, walked on the first Sunday of term along the deserted towpath of a quiet canal. Once we passed a slow barge moving between the pollarded willows—it might be an emblem of a world at peace, where no one was in a hurry. Further up, five swans glided along; from the bank a small tabby kitten watched them, devoured by an overweening ambition—they were birds, and her natural prey.

"I do like peace," said Stephen, with a happy sigh. "It's so infinitely nicer than war."

"Oh, dear, I suppose we must go home and face poor old Foyle," I said.

She came to see us while we were finishing tea, and her gloom was impenetrable. She could hardly speak, and it was almost impossible to speak to her. Fortunately we were happy enough to stand up to her; and the weather was good.

Not long afterwards Mary asked us to tea; Cyprian was with them for a few days. He was not acting at present with Miranda, who was doing nothing for the moment, but he was shortly going to appear in what, since Mary was the narrator, was of course a marvelous part, in a wonderful new play, with a thrilling cast. Naturally Stephen and I at once forgot the details.

We found, as we had expected, Tucker at his most pugnacious: "We shouldn't have truckled to them!" he said. His pince-nez flashed fire.

Cyprian, we were much more surprised to see, lifted a hand, from which a bracelet dangled, in stern denunciation of the peace. The reaction had set in. Mary, however, was in two minds about the whole thing: she had joined an organization for helping Czech refugees, from which she expected to derive a lot of excitement.

"Can't we enjoy the peace a little, now we've got it?" pleaded Stephen sensibly. "We may not have it for so very long."

There was a shocked silence—it is a curious popular error to believe that people are not easily shocked nowadays. Then they all said that they couldn't,

shouldn't, and didn't want to be happy at the expense of the poor Czechs.

"Well, it's done, now," I said. And I pointed out to Mary that her organization would very soon discover plenty of Czechs who were perfectly ready to be happy at the expense of the people of Christminster—as indeed events proved. However, all the Tuckers thought me very cynical and heartless, and Cyprian went so far as to call me so.

"As you're so full of heart," I said quietly, "I hope you're going to see poor Mrs. Foyle?"

"Andrew, that awful old harridan!" cried Cyprian. "I don't know how you can suggest such a thing. I don't feel I can just now—when I'm still so upset about Czechoslovakia." He sounded quite hurt, as indeed people often are if you point out to them an uncongenial duty.

"She'd like it, I daresay," said Stephen. "She's very depressed just now."

"So she deserves to be," said Cyprian. "The trouble that she's been making this year at Kellynch. . . ."

Stephen and I looked at each other. This was what we had gone to tea with the Tuckers in the hopes of hearing about—not their opinions about Munich.

"She *will* butt in on things she doesn't understand," said Cyprian.

There had been a rich widow, with some pretensions as a patroness of the arts, staying at Kellynch. Peter had wished to interest her in a theatrical venture of some sort. He had been very attentive to her—and, for reasons of his own, he had no objection to some

people thinking him a little too attentive. Cyprian's allusive manner, strings of Christian names, and assumptions that we knew all the people concerned, made this part of his narrative a little obscure; however, we did not care what Peter was up to.

"Too ridiculous!" Mary put in. "As if we didn't all know!" So presumably she knew.

Well that, said Cyprian, was as it might be. Anyhow, Miranda knew entirely what Peter was about—as always, there was perfect confidence between them. But unfortunately Mrs. Foyle, looking at the obvious features of the case—for naturally all others were studiously hidden from her—had jumped to the conclusion that Peter was deceiving Miranda with Lady Williams. She was pathetically delighted with her own astuteness, and believed that she had discovered something Miranda didn't know. And of course she was as furious as a tigress in defense of her daughter.

We could well imagine how terrified Mrs. Foyle must have been of the loss of Peter and Kellynch, which had been won after so much pain. No chance of Miranda returning later on as the mother of the next baronet.

"You're blind, Miranda; you're a fool, Miranda," was repeated in and out of season. And there was the threat: "If you don't have it out properly with Peter, and have that woman sent away, I shall do something myself." As Mrs. Foyle was mortally scared of her son-in-law, Miranda thought she could safely ignore that threat.

Luckily for us, Cyprian had spent a week end at

Kellynch just when the crisis occurred. From guests who had been there longer than himself, and in part from Miranda, he had subsequently gathered the events that led up to it.

For an evening diversion they had played the Truth Game, in which one is pledged to answer questions with absolute truth, yes or no, or with silence. It must, I should think, have been quite a novelty to many in that circle to speak the truth, and one hardly wonders that they made an elaborate game of it when they did it for once.

The usual rather improper questions had been asked. A shy young man had been asked if he were a virgin, and everyone was a little shocked when he admitted that he was, instead of hiding under a decent silence. Then it fell to Mrs. Foyle to ask Freda Williams a question, and she asked straight out: "Have you committed adultery with my son-in-law?"

"No," said Lady Williams. "Certainly not."

This alone was galling enough to Peter, who would have been gratified by a mysterious silence. It did not matter to him that she was so scared and mortified that he had no more chance of overcoming her virtue, for he had never meant to attempt such a thing. But his good relations with a future patroness of the drama had been permanently destroyed, and he had been made to look a fool by his wife's vulgar mother.

In nervous anger he retreated to his own rooms, shut himself up there, and told Miranda that he had no intention of coming out again until her mother had left Kellynch. Miranda could do much with Peter—Cyp-

rian said that without her he would never have had the strength and courage to become a great actor, so intensely did he suffer from those parts of the artistic temperament which are most trying both to its possessor and those round him. But there were occasions when Miranda could do nothing, and this was one of them; and she always knew when she was beaten. She had a large party of guests to entertain, who had already enjoyed the incident quite enough—Peter sulking by himself in his rooms would have been far too big a treat for them. They would have talked of nothing else when they got back to London. So Mrs. Foyle had to go, and it was doubtful if she would set foot in Kellynch again.

"Of course Miranda has always been an angel to her," was Cyprian's comment. "But I'm sure she's thankful for the excuse to get rid of her—it's been an awful strain, sometimes, to go on being sweet to the old hag."

That we could understand a good deal better than Cyprian, but our hearts bled for Mrs. Foyle.

"People don't mind things very much at that age," said Mary, stupidly but with a kind intention. She had seen our faces.

"It's dreadful when old people feel nothing will come right again," I said. "Young people don't have the same heavy, hopeless misery—at least, not after they are children. You know what a sick animal looks like—that desperate illness? They lose all their morale, they never think they are going to get better. When old people are very unhappy they're like that."

"She'll be dead soon," said Cyprian brutally.

"The sooner 'tis over, the sooner to sleep," said his brother.

But old age is long, as long as childhood, and the thoughts of the aged are long, long thoughts. None of the Tuckers, of course, could be expected to understand either of those states. It needs imagination.

On our way home, we looked in on Mrs. Foyle.

"Oh, my Lord," she said, "I do wish the war had broken out! It would have taken things off one's mind a bit."

Few people are so candid about their views on war and peace, but more people feel like Mrs. Foyle than might readily be thought. Possibly this feeling is a greater danger to world peace than the private manufacture of armaments. I hope not, for it will be far harder to put an end to.

16

IT was a pity that Mrs. Foyle allowed herself to be so completely submerged by her misery that she could take no interest in the doings of her neighbors: a pity for her—because otherwise the quarrel between Mrs. Heath and Mrs. Newsom might have amused her; a pity for us—because, if she had taken an interest in it, Stephen and I might be better informed. Of course we had the evidence of Mrs. Preston, a most intelligent witness, but she was only in that house three hours a day. From what she told us, we concluded that Mrs. Heath, having a French conscience about the importance of food, was outraged by the stinginess of her partner's housekeeping.

"I will give them just a *leetle* beefsteak," Mrs. Preston heard her pleading.

"No, they will have quite enough without," rejoined Mrs. Newsom. "More than enough."

This dispute, apparently, was held in full hearing of their lodgers. But sometimes, for greater privacy, they withdrew to the staircase for their conversations. Here they were reckoning without Mrs. Preston.

"A regular stack-up they were having," she told us, after one of their livelier encounters. "As a matter of

fact I was rather interested," she added candidly. "So I just took the bucket to empty, and went out."

The consequence of their differences of opinion was that Mrs. Heath left one day in a temper. She had done all the cooking. Mrs. Newsom's own culinary skill went little further than turning out the contents of a tin, and the one feeble-minded servant could hardly be trusted to do even so much as that without horribly gashing herself. It goes without saying that Mrs. Preston was entreated to come to the rescue, and so she did, busy as she was, for she was devoured by curiosity about the establishment over Mrs. Foyle's head.

Perhaps Stephen and I have the *esprit de concierge* to a blamable extent, certainly we have it to an extent that is not at all well-bred—but how very dull life would be without some of one's faults. It would, for instance, be very sad not to be a little greedy.

Naturally we were delighted that Mrs. Preston should find time for Mrs. Newsom—and, avid for news, we gladly sacrificed half an hour of her morning that was due to ourselves.

"I said to Mr. Preston, I could write a pantomime about her," said Mrs. Preston. And for our benefit she enacted one.

"She comes into the kitchen, sir, as Gladys and me are having breakfast. 'What are you having there?' she says. 'Tea?' 'Yes, ma'am,' I said. 'D'you have to have tea?' she says. 'Well, madam, what do you want us to have?' I said. 'Coffee?' '*Coffee!*' she says. 'The ideal! What servants are coming to, nowadays! You had a cup

of tea first thing, before you gave us ours; why can't you have water now?' 'I'm very sorry, ma'am,' I said, 'but while I'm here we don't have water for breakfast in the kitchen. I never heard of such a thing!' "

We had never heard of such a thing, either—though our great-great-uncle Henry was a miser, and ate his eggshells.

"She's got three young ladies with her, very sweet young ladies," Mrs. Preston informed us. The foreign students had melted away during the crisis and were now, no doubt, being properly fed in France or Belgium. Mrs. Newsom had been lucky enough to find some undergraduates to take their place.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Preston,' the young ladies said to me, 'we're so hungry! Do give us a good lunch!' So I said: 'Don't be afraid, miss, I'll see you have enough to eat.' And then madam comes into the kitchen again to give the orders for the day, and she says: 'Well, now, there's the water the artichokes were boiled in yesterday—with a little browning that will make a delicious soup. Then, I thought, you could make a macaroni cheese. After a good lunch like that, they'll only need a light supper—some sardines, perhaps, and a little lettuce. Miss Theresa will be able to see to that.' So I said: 'Madam, you're never going to starve those young ladies! They're studying hard, and they need to be properly nourished.' 'Oh,' says she, 'what d'you suggest giving them, then?' 'Well, madam,' I said, 'they tell me they like rabbits. I thought of giving them rabbits.' '*Rabbits!*' she says. 'Well, ma'am,' I said,

'we're a large party, and there isn't a lot on just one rabbit.' 'Then you must be a very extravagant cook,' she says."

With Mrs. Preston's help that household was somehow kept together—but even she could do nothing in face of the sudden appearance of Mr. Newsom. We had often wondered if he were dead, or if, like Captain Foyle, he had run away—and there would be every excuse for him. Perhaps he had never existed, though of course all those children had to be accounted for somehow. In fact, he had been a voluntary patient in a private mental home, where his bills were not being paid at all regularly—in consequence Mrs. Preston found him one day on the doorstep.

Servants generally have a strong sympathy for the master of the house—Mrs. Barron's attachment to the memory of the pirate captain, whom she had never seen, was no exception. Mrs. Preston did her best to welcome Mr. Newsom on his arrival—and I am sure she was further stimulated by a knowledge that she was being wicked. "The master's here," she told his wife. And then, as she said, the fat was in the fire.

"There's no master in this house," said Mrs. Newsom.

"We'll see about that," said Mr. Newsom, threatening with an umbrella.

"You mustn't excite yourself, Timothy," said his wife. "You know, you haven't been well."

"Haven't been well, woman!" snorted Mr. Newsom. "I've been mad!"

He swept round with his umbrella, and down came

the red lamp burning in front of the oleograph of the Sacred Heart, and was smashed to pieces on the floor.

"I stamped the fire out," Mrs. Preston told us. "Those two were quite capable of letting the house burn down, while they went at it hammer and tongs."

"I suppose in these circumstances it could hardly be expected to keep peace in the house," I said, I hope not irreverently. "St. Margaret Mary couldn't have foreseen Mr. Newsom—and Mrs. Newsom evidently didn't."

"And after all, Mrs. Heath and Mrs. Newsom generally went out on the staircase for a particularly bad stack-up," said Stephen.

"It's dreadful for poor Mrs. Foyle, sir, having all that going on over her head," said Mrs. Preston. "I shall tell her to get rid of them next quarter, sir. I only hope she gets paid the rent due to her, which I gravely doubt. Mrs. Newsom is a terrible woman, sir—she is a person who just lives on her wits."

"Mrs. Foyle is so miserable just now," said Stephen, "that one hardly likes her to be worried."

"Do her good to be taken out of herself, sir," said Mrs. Preston, with rough kindness. "One worry drives out another; that's Nature's way."

"It seems rather hard," I said.

"Well, it's Nature, sir," said Mrs. Preston philosophically. "We can't go against Nature."

I suppose we can't, or at any rate that it will not pay us if we do—but it sometimes seems rather a pity.

"Shall you go on working for Mrs. Newsom?" Stephen inquired.

"Well, I don't rightly know, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "I expect the young ladies will be leaving as soon as they can. It isn't really fit for them to stay there now, with a madman in the house. It's a pity, really, sir, because they're such sweet young ladies. One of them's father is a general, and another one is some relation to the Duke of Bedford."

The young ladies very soon left. We never knew whether they went home to the general, and to the kindred of the Duke of Bedford, or whether, more probably, they found some other lodgings, because we forgot to ask Mrs. Preston, who will certainly have followed their movements. They did well to go when they did, if one may judge from a series of crescendo noises heard over Mrs. Foyle's head; Newsom family life seemed to have grown very violent. Mrs. Foyle was scared, and Mrs. Preston found no great difficulty in persuading her to write a stern letter to her tenant asking her to leave at Christmas and offering to release her from her last quarter's rent, which was in arrears, in lieu of adequate notice.

"I said: 'You'll probably never see the money anyhow, ma'am,'" said Mrs. Preston. "'If you let her stay on, she'll only run up a debt against you. You've the law on your side, too; you could turn her out tomorrow if you wanted.'"

No answer was immediately returned, but a day or two later I called on Mrs. Foyle and found her roused out of her wretchedness and apathy. Mrs. Newsom had done her all the good in the world; she had come in and made a scene.

"Oh, my Lord, Stephen, that woman!" she said. For some time past she had tended to muddle our names, but today this was surely to be put down to indignation, rather than to loss of memory. There was no feebleness about Mrs. Foyle now.

"I always told you she was the wrong sort," continued Mrs. Foyle—and I assigned this lapse also to the same reason. "I'm not often mistaken in a woman; I knew no good was to be expected of her—but all the same, Andrew, I didn't think she'd turn out quite as bad as this. Oh, my Lord, I *am* unlucky with the top flat!"

Mrs. Newsom had put on a large hat with cherries bobbing about all over it, and a pair of long white gauntlet gloves, merely to come downstairs with—which was a fair measure of her breeding—and at first she had just stood in the door and gushed.

"Butter's cheap today! I thought," said Mrs. Foyle. "But I was very firm indeed, I said at my age I couldn't put up with that row over my head, and I couldn't afford to keep on tenants who didn't pay their rent punctually."

I asked what had happened next.

"She took a bit of paper out of her bag," said Mrs. Foyle. "She held it up so that I couldn't see it. And there she stood, with the cherries bobbing about on her hat. She said, 'Perhaps, then, it will interest you to hear what your landlord has to say. I have written to the Bursar of St. Mark's.' So she pretended to read from this bit of paper: 'Mrs. Foyle has no business to turn you out, you have every right to stay on. You

were quite right to complain to me, and I'll see she doesn't interfere with you,' and so on, and so forth. So I said, 'Just let me see the letter, please.' And she said, 'No,' and snatched it away."

Mrs. Foyle's eyes were still shining after the fight.

"Well, I wasn't born yesterday," she said. "I wasn't going to be taken in by that woman. I could see she was a fool as well as a knave and hadn't even had the sense to bring something written down with her. 'Would you mind reading it again?' I said. Then she tried to bluster out of it. She said: 'You've heard it once, that's quite enough—you can't have forgotten what's in it already.' So I said, 'It seems as if you have.' "

Thereupon Mrs. Newsom's wrath had exploded, and she had used language which Mrs. Foyle preferred to leave to my imagination—which was annoying, because though I can easily imagine things Mrs. Newsom might have said, I should so much rather know. In spite of all the years she had passed in a university town, Mrs. Foyle had not learned the advantage of knowledge over even the best-grounded opinion. But perhaps she was right not to tell me, for Stephen and I were not spared—though I do not know how we came to be dragged in.

"She was like a fishwife!" said Mrs. Foyle. "Oh, my Lord, I know what it is to have people talking horribly to me. But now poor old Mrs. Barron is gone, I thought I was through with all that sort of thing. Oh, Miranda would have been furious to hear me spoken to like that!"

Her bravery had gone so far, that in recovered spirits

she had unconsciously revived the Miranda myth. But suddenly she winced.

"At least, there was a time when she would have been," she said. And she hurried on to tell me how she had rung up the Bursar of St. Mark's, and had received his assurance that no such letter had been sent to Mrs. Newsom, nor would be sent.

"I hate a liar," she said. "And such a silly lie too."

Stephen was delighted when I told him the story, and I think as genuinely delighted at Mrs. Foyle's recovery as at the Newsom episode.

"One remembers Mrs. Foyle's own training as a Christminster landlady," I said. "She could stand up to anyone. And—much as I hate the word—she has guts."

"It is the right word," said Stephen. "Though I could not let it pass my own lips."

This spurt of energy kept Mrs. Foyle up until after Christmas. She had to be sure that the Newsoms really cleared out, and that they took nothing with them that was not their own. She devoted hours to this task, and Mrs. Preston often worked overtime, posted on point duty on the stairs, which she greatly enjoyed. Of course it was so obvious that Mrs. Foyle could not go away until the house was clear of her tenants and had been cleaned up after them, that she did not have to apologize for not being at Kellynch. For the moment her heart really was in the Woodbury road.

One can often get through the winter very well until Christmas, cherishing the illusion that spring is then

not far behind. This illusion is seldom proof against January, a month not really tolerable anywhere in the northern hemisphere, and much worse in Christminster than almost anywhere else. A month of river fog, and rain, and flooded fields, and of lengthening, unwanted daylight. Mrs. Foyle returned to all of her former gloom before the month was out.

"At least we can shut it all out," said Stephen, pulling the curtains—and we had tea in the warmth, by lamplight, annihilating the damp world outside.

Next door, one knew, poor Mrs. Foyle with her dreary and economical habits—were they acquired in the years of poverty, and perhaps even now not unnecessary?—would be sitting in an unlighted room with an uncovered window. Outside, bicycles plashed and skidded in the Woodbury road. Girl students in wringing-wet gowns were going to odd little afternoon lectures, of the sort that men would never be so foolish as to forsake their strong tea and their anchovy toast for.

For once I felt glad that Mrs. Foyle was not a regular churchgoer: at this time of the year it might depress rather than comfort her, I thought, with its unseasonable liturgical color.

"How I loathe the Sundays after Epiphany," I said to Stephen, "with that unnatural, unwholesome green!"

"We'll soon be in purple now," said Stephen consolingly. And in fact Septuagesima fell early next month.

At this time Mrs. Preston's conversation with us,

and I daresay with Mrs. Foyle, was generally about the filth that the Newsoms had left behind. She said that it had to be seen to be believed, and that if they had kept pigs instead of paying guests—and such sweet young ladies too—it could not have been worse.

“I’ve been over it all twice with soap and water,” she told us, “and it’s still a disgrace.”

But now the Newsoms were gone, it was difficult to keep Mrs. Foyle’s indignation against them burning; she listened, we gathered, with indifference to stories of their ill-doings, and was not in the least interested in their subsequent movements, on which Mrs. Preston kept a sharp lookout.

Then one day Mrs. Preston had something new to tell us. Mrs. Foyle’s reserve had broken down and she had confessed that Miranda was unkind to her, and always had been.

“I didn’t think she’d ever commit herself,” said Mrs. Preston. “All that time she’s been refusing to commit, sir. She’ll feel better, sir, now that she has committed.” She bolstered up this comforting opinion by citing a parallel incident in the history of the Tanqueray family—who certainly must have gone through a great deal of trouble.

Mrs. Preston was of course too loyal to tell us anything that we did not already know; but we knew so much and were, as she often said, the only real friends poor Mrs. Foyle had in the world beside herself, that we were able to have many long talks on the subject.

I was at first much less disposed to rejoice that Mrs. Foyle had committed herself—it seemed a giving-up,

a preparation for death of the sort that is seldom made until death is really near.

"Oh, no, much better to get it off her chest, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "While it was on her chest, sir, I should always be afraid of it going *somewhere else*."

She pronounced the last words with so grim an emphasis that I knew she must mean the brain.

"I said: 'Now, you have a good cry, ma'am; don't mind me,' I said," Mrs. Preston told us. "Then I told her: 'You'll feel a great deal better now,' and I made her a nice cup of tea. And I think she did feel better."

I am sure she did. Le Père Goriot missed a lot by being French: coffee is not at all the same thing. And as for Lear—imagine the fool producing a nice cup of tea out of a thermos! To do him justice, I think Shakespeare might very well have allowed him this comfort, had it been invented in his time—he is sometimes pitiful towards his characters.

Poor Mrs. Foyle had unburdened herself, talking to Mrs. Preston as one of her neighbors might—all pretense of gentility (and there had never been much of that) was dropped. She must have looked a dreadful mess, I am afraid, her chalked eyebrows smeared with tears. But she could not have found a more suitable person to listen to her. There can be no one so passionately interested in other people's lives as Mrs. Preston is, who is at the same time so kind.

"What a sad life she has had!" said Stephen.

"Yes, sir, even starting under a disadvantage, as one might say," said Mrs. Preston delicately. "And then

marrying that man. He used to be cruel to her about those toes and fingers, sir. Now that wasn't manly."

Indeed not; nor womanly to allow oneself to be repelled by them, as his daughter did. And so we said to Mrs. Preston.

"Like father, like daughter, sir," she said. We felt that between Miranda and her scarlet nails, and her father and his hook, there was not much to choose—both were red in claw. It was true that Captain Foyle had deliberately married a wife whom he knew to have deformed hands—though the feet may have come as an unpleasant surprise later—and he ought not to have done it, if it was a deformity he couldn't bear the sight of. Mr. Waterfield would never have done such a thing. Miranda, on the other hand, had not chosen to be born to a mother with such an affliction—but surely, she ought to have got used to seeing something she had known from childhood.

Mrs. Preston answered my thought. "He used to say sarcastic things about her hands, sir, and in front of their child, too. Now that was very wrong, sir; making her grow up feeling disgusted with her mother."

It was all of a piece throughout, like an ancient tragedy. Mrs. Foyle was just as much marked out for misery by her maimed toes and fingers, as *Œdipus* was doomed by his thong-pierced and swollen feet. Everything that happened to her hinged upon them. If she had had the proper number of joints she might have lived like her normal sister Jessie, happy at Leamington Spa in the society of cats. Why Fate should have singled out one daughter of the house of Snaggs for

this cruel affliction, I cannot guess—but I feel sure it was not as a punishment for any evil done by the estimable Henry Snaggs, a much nicer character than that shocking scoundrel, the father of Œdipus.

But if Fate meant Mrs. Foyle to be a tragic heroine, then it was kind to have provided Mrs. Preston in the role of confidante—she could do so much to support and comfort her in that grand and lonely position—and for us it was both consoling and interesting that Mrs. Preston should occupy this role. I have often thought that in planning the drama of people's lives Fate generally has an audience in view, at any rate for her best effects. I have long realized that Stephen and I were the foreordained spectators of that action in which Mrs. Foyle was protagonist—our function being a little like that of a Greek chorus.

So I suppose I ought to bear witness, ere I die, that these things were not otherwise but thus.

17

THE buds broke as the last hopes of the world were breaking. The young gentlemen went away for their vacation, and came back after six weeks to a lusher, greener Christminster. Among the thick grass of our water meadows the fritillary was growing, that quaint flower quaintly called by one of our poets "the dapple-eared lily." It was sold in bunches in the streets, a trade which one ought not to encourage, as it is too often pulled up by the roots—and so it will soon be exterminated, like all "that is original, spare, strange." Swans had hatched out their young in their odd, big nests like open tarts, in sheltered places by the river. On the first of May, choristers ascended a high tower at dawn, following a pseudomedieval tradition invented in the reign of Queen Victoria, and sang their hymn to the accompaniment of horns and motors below:

Te Deum Patrem colimus . . .

At the Sacred Heart they were celebrating spring after a more unlovely fashion; I walked into church one evening to find May devotions in full swing, and

Father Hanrahan in the pulpit telling an edifying story.

"A certain man fell overboard from an ocean liner. There was great sympathy expressed for his widow by all the passengers. But then one kind man took off his hat and put two coins in it, and held it out to his neighbor. 'I sympathize to the extent of five shillings,' he said. 'What is your sympathy worth?' It is this sort of practical sympathy, dear brethren, that we must try to learn from Our Blessed Lady during Her Month."

Then in front of me, almost hidden by a pillar, I saw Mrs. Foyle, her head tilted upwards. Was she gazing at the row on row of mass-produced plaster saints round the apse, or at the statue of Our Lady of the Victories, apparently made of rather unwholesome meringue? I hope she was not listening to Father Hanrahan—I don't think she knew what she wanted, but I am sure five shillings' worth of practical sympathy would have done her very little good.

The congregation sang—the rather ragged singing of untrained English and Irish voices. It was a hymn to a sickly tune, with some such words as these:

Ave Maria! the night shades are falling,
Softly our voices arise unto Thee,
Earth's lonely exiles for succor are squalling—
Sinless and beautiful Star of the Sea!

?

I crept out, because I thought Mrs. Foyle might have been embarrassed to discover that I had seen her there.

I wondered if she had found or was trying to find

religion. She would certainly not tell Mrs. Preston about it, Stephen and I agreed—and she would be unlikely to tell us until she had something definite to say; probably she was just groping in the dark.

At this point in her story I can only guess, in the absence of direct testimony, but certain sighs and broken sentences which will be reported later give some corroboration to my guess.

I see her passing the Sacred Heart, as she must have daily, on her way in and out of town. Generally she would go by in a bus, but occasionally on foot. The great crucifix, crude and gory, hung over the street, with its inscription: WHAT IS IT TO YOU? . . . "What is it to me?" she may have asked herself.

One day, tired and wretched, perhaps wanting to delay her lonely return home, perhaps wanting only to sit down and cry, or perhaps with a tiny stir of curiosity, she had pushed back the heavy leathern curtain and found herself in the darkness of the church—for when not lit up for a service it was mercifully dark. I suppose, with a dim remembrance of what people did in Catholic churches, she may have groped with her hands round the heavy moldings of the alabaster holy water font, may have inserted the empty tip of one of the fingers of her glove, making a clumsy attempt to bless herself—she may even have made some sort of inclination in the direction of the east, where five red stars of light flickered in the otherwise pitchy blackness of the sanctuary.

It was dark and warm—like the womb, like the cinema—two very good places to be like. But if the

comparison had occurred to her, I am sure she would have been shocked. Church was church after all. Perhaps she knelt down for a moment and uttered a prayer of one word into the darkness: "Miranda . . . Miranda . . ." uncertain perhaps whether she were the saint prayed to, or the favor prayed for. Then, out of training for prayer, her knees ached and she sat back on the edge of the pitch pine seat.

"I wish I were a Roman Catholic," she said, "it would make things much easier." Easier to bear life, easier even to kneel upright and pray.

"But it's no use," she said vaguely. "It's too late."

All the same, I think she had a feeling of temporary safety which made her unwilling to go away. She sat down on the seat, beside her shopping basket. The various quotidian activities of the church were going on round about her, and as they were only dimly understood by her, she found them interesting and soothing. Indistinct little people of undeterminate age and sex, dressed in black and wearing green baize aprons, bustled about the church. Their feet clattered on the encaustic tiles and rang on the metal gratings that covered the heating apparatus. They lowered lamps, cleaned and polished them, filled them up with fresh oil, and adjusted the wick—or they put candlesticks on altars, or took them away. Every now and then, one of them shot down on one knee in the direction of the sanctuary. One of these persons advanced down the aisle and whispered something in the ear of a lady in a fur coat—she nodded repeatedly, but did not rise from her knees. A priest in cotta and stole

went up to the high altar and returned with something clasped to his breast, leaving the church by a side door, preceded by a small boy tinkling a bell. An undergraduate walked up the south aisle and pressed the sacristy bell, which responded with a submerged and distant toot.

To a Catholic, none of this would have presented any interest. He might half consciously have noticed that the sacristans were cleaning the church, that there was a priest taking the viaticum to a sick person, or a boy ringing the bell for confession—just as in a public garden one sees without attention gardeners going in and out of potting sheds or greenhouses.

To Mrs. Foyle it must have been like entering an alien civilization—at first alarming but then friendly. She watched all these people, I imagine, with growing envy—as a tourist from the north, sitting at a café table on the pavement of a warm southern town, watches the life of the place and envies the people who really live and have their work there.

She was a stranger, she didn't live there, she had to go away. But first, perhaps, she wandered round the church, looking at the shrines and altars—she had not been in there for years. Finally, greatly daring, she lit a candle to St. Anthony or to Our Lady—She was a mother too. Probably she loitered at the door and examined the cards that requested her to pray for the souls of people who, when alive, had had aristocratic and Gunpowder Plot sort of names, like Throckmorton. She must have fingered the Catholic Truth Society's tracts in the case on the wall; I don't think

she would have wasted time over those against Birth Control or Communism, but perhaps she bought one called *Why Must We Suffer?*

It is not at all likely that she noticed that the church was repellently ugly—that every available space was ornamented, and that every line of ornament was debased, cowardly and ostentatious. She was looking for home, and she hoped as well as feared that it might be here. She was at the very first stage of what is called Faith.

The first night that I ever spent in Christminster, as a scholarship candidate, I wandered about the moonlit streets with a friend from school who was up for the same examination. Bell ringers were practicing in one of the churches, and we followed the music through a maze of byways in the unknown town, now coming nearer, now going further away. Suddenly out of a gray gothic lane we emerged into a small square, where the moon shone full on a stocky little square tower, out of which all that sound was pouring—and the bells clashed and shouted round our ears with the exultation of hounds in full cry.

The Church had not yet got Mrs. Foyle standing like that, at bay, in front of her—she had started on the strange chase in which the quarry has to pick up scent. For a moment at the Sacred Heart it had seemed to be strong. Like a blindfolded child hunting for an object in an indoor game, she seemed to hear voices saying: "Warmer! Warmer!" And then the scent went cold again.

But Mrs. Foyle was too old and too sad to have the

energy for that doubly tiring chase in which one is both the hunter and the hunted—and her heart was not in it. Miranda had all her heart. Moreover there is one moment when blind courage is needed, and a leap in the dark—even though one may alight after it on solid earth and with the feeling that there had been (little as one knew it) such a very short way to jump. Mrs. Foyle was too tired to have that courage. It is odd that people should say they will get religion when they are old—perhaps they do not know what is involved, otherwise they would hardly choose that period in their lives to make a so violent change. If Mrs. Foyle said to herself: “It’s too late”—and I am sure she did—I am afraid she was right. It was too late in this life.

I am very far indeed, I hope, from being cynical about poor Mrs. Foyle’s gropings. I don’t think she had gone into the Sacred Heart to find an opiate for her ache or a plaster for her sores, as one might go into a chemist’s shop. She would probably have been aware that such a quest would only lead to disappointment—though she was not really intelligent, she had had to listen to so much quasi-intelligent conversation, that she was no longer simple. I believe she had vaguely hoped to find a Person or People to comfort her—but her heart and mind were now too weary and muddled for her to make new friends, whether earthly or heavenly. She went home, feeling that she must do the best she could with ourselves, and with Mrs. Preston. Possibly that is why she was rather cross with us nowadays. We did not suspect that she had immortal

longings—small wonder if we seemed to her rather petty and materialistic.

My glimpse of her in church put me in mind of one or two little things I had half consciously noted. She had altered the position of a crucifix, given to her years ago by a foreign student who had lodged with her—it now stood in a more prominent place. Then there were a few telltale words and phrases: perhaps she said “Our Lady” instead of “The Blessed Virgin.” A person who read as little as Mrs. Foyle could hardly read anything without betraying it in some way. And I saw something that looked suspiciously like a twopenny tract lying about.

“If I had any religion I’d be a Roman Catholic,” she said once—but people often say that, and it does not mean very much. She may have said it before, and I would not have remembered it specially.

Another day she said, “You’re lucky to be a Roman Catholic, Andrew. Lucky for you they caught you when you were young. It’s too late for me.”

I was a little embarrassed. “It’s never too late,” I said—it seemed a correct thing to say, and was probably what she would like to hear—it obliged her to nothing.

“Oh, no; I couldn’t turn at my age,” said Mrs. Foyle. There was a little note in her voice that seemed to ask me to deny this. I said nothing—it was a battle she had to fight for herself. But I wondered if I had been wrong not to reveal myself to her in church that day. If she had been wanting to talk about religion, and had been bottling herself up, my appearance at that moment

would have helped her to come to the point. It is as difficult to begin talking about religion as it is to begin talking about love—and as easy to go on, when one has once begun. The difficulty is then to stop.

Then one day she suddenly said to me, "Andrew, promise not to tell anyone—not even Stephen?"

I promised.

"Do you think I ought to become a Catholic?" she asked.

"Do you think you ought?" I asked, in my turn.

"I don't know," she said. "Sometimes I wonder if I've just been afraid of it, and if I'm making excuses now, because I'm so old . . . it's hard at my time of life."

"I'm sure it is," I said. "But I don't think it's often easy."

"Could I do it without anyone knowing ever—even Miranda?"

"I daresay you could," I said. "You'd have to go to Mass—but probably no one you knew would see you there. Here in Christminster there are so many churches. But I think it would have to come out after your death."

"Oh, it would have to then?" she asked nervously.

"I'm not quite sure," I said. "But I think so."

She made an effort to be brave. "It won't matter then," she said.

"Do you want to see a priest?" I asked her.

She recoiled. "Oh, not yet," she said. "I don't know at all—yet. I will ask you to help me when I do. So you do think it's worth while, even at my age?"

I told her I did; she could hardly have expected the answer to be no, and if I had given it, she probably would not have liked it. It would have been shutting the door of a possible place of refuge in her face. But yet she evidently did not altogether like the answer I had given. It might be her duty to make the lonely journey to the dangerous, mysterious Rome. In a woman of her age and antecedents, I imagined the dread of Popery was a living thing—she must have started life at quite the opposite end of the Christian scale, for I suspect Mr. Snaggs of having been chapel.

It is a strange thing that life tends to follow a pattern, or perhaps it is that, having begun to follow one of the patterns in the complicated carpet of life, the eye begins to meet it everywhere. Possibly other people were also interested in the state of Mrs. Foyle's soul, and I had failed to notice it before.

The Tuckers were talking about the depression into which she had fallen.

"You ought to get her to church, Tommy," said his wife.

"Work for others would help her to forget herself," said Tommy—for that is how he saw Church. And off he went to a committee of some sort—for that is how he saw work for others. "Where two or three are gathered together . . ." he was fond of quoting; we were never so unkind as to ask him in whose name they were gathered. He had no time for Mrs. Foyle by herself, and I daresay that was just as well, for he could only have annoyed her. Moreover he wanted her to for-

get herself, whereas she was trying to remember herself properly for the first time in her life.

Mr. Waterfield also showed an interest in her.

"These are bad times we live in," he said to me one day. I replied that I had just been greeted in the same words by Mrs. Foyle.

"She is not a good churchwoman, I think," said Mr. Waterfield, showing more spirituality than Tucker. "I must say I find it a relief to be able to 'flop' in these days. They must be even more trying for those who have not that resource. I presume you seized my reference to *A Tale of Two Cities*?"

"Yes," I said.

"I think I will add Mrs. Foyle's name to my Intercession list," said Mr. Waterfield. "I will pray for her on Wednesdays and Fridays when I have taken to attending the recitation of the Litany at Polly and Nick—I mean to recommend your brother to attend also—but perhaps you had better not tell her so."

"She ought to be very much obliged to you," I said, for it seemed that someone ought to acknowledge his kindness.

"It is nothing," said old Waterfield courteously.

But Mrs. Foyle began to retreat. Perhaps she had only ventured out of curiosity and despair her few paces along the path to Rome, but I think she had heard a voice that conscience told her to follow, and that it was cowardice that called her back. That is certainly what it looked like.

"I'm quite off the Roman church now," she told me emphatically one day.

"Oh?" I said.

"There are a lot of things you do I could never agree with."

I asked what they were.

"All this shutting up of men and women in monasteries and convents now," she said, in a fussy tone of voice. "I could never be a Roman Catholic because of that."

"You wouldn't have to be a nun," I said.

"No, but you have to believe in it," she said. "Do *you* believe in it?"

"Certainly," I said, "for some people—those who have the vocation."

"I couldn't," she said. "I don't think it's right."

"I don't think one can pick out bits to believe or disbelieve," I said. "There's the whole thing—it hangs together, and one must take it or leave it."

"Well, I suppose I've got an independent mind," said Mrs. Foyle, with some self-satisfaction. "I have to think things out for myself. I can't let myself be dictated to by anyone."

I said no more—and I have often wondered uneasily if she wanted me to say more. She never returned to the subject again.

I had found it an embarrassment to know something about Mrs. Foyle that I was not free to tell Stephen—like so many things and people she hardly existed for me completely except when Stephen and I were talking about her, and the natural form in which any solitary thought of mine about her was couched must always be, as so much of my thought, an imaginary con-

versation with my brother. Now, with a feeling of falseness, I had to listen to his speculations about her present frame of mind and pretend to know nothing. There were times when he came very near to the truth.

Then I saw her again in church, it was one Sunday at Mass—and this I felt entitled to tell him.

Father Hanrahan had preached on Modesty, and it was while he was telling an edifying story from the pulpit that I noticed Mrs. Foyle.

"In a certain city, and it was in a so-called Catholic country, I regret to say, a man and his daughter got into a tram. The girl was wearing skirts as short as this . . ." and Father Hanrahan indicated the lace edge of his cotta, well above his waist. I hope this was a pardonable exaggeration.

"And she crossed her legs," he went on. "Then, after they had traveled five or ten minutes in this tram, the father said angrily to a young man sitting opposite: 'Why do you keep staring at my daughter's legs?' 'I'm not staring at your daughter's legs,' replied the young man. 'She is showing them to me.'"

This repartee, we were told, was the finest type of Catholic action.

Excellent young man—but I did not feel that Mrs. Foyle would derive any help or comfort from this tale. Then I told myself not to be unfair. Father Hanrahan was speaking to his own congregation, not to strangers who happened to drop in to sample his church—he had to consider the needs of his parishioners, not those of Mrs. Foyle. And if they really wore nothing below

the waist, then it was quite time they were told about it.

This time I waited for her, going out—she was wearing very short skirts indeed, which ill became her, and she looked a little flushed. She clutched her small, stumpy parasol angrily, as if she would like to hit someone with it.

“Fancy seeing you here!” I said foolishly; one had to say something—and I felt disinclined to say, “What did you think of the sermon?”

“Why shouldn’t I come here as much as you?” said Mrs. Foyle peevishly. “It’s not private, you know.”

“Why shouldn’t you, indeed?” I said peacefully. But she was annoyed that I had seen her. I believe she had not rejected the Church so much as she said—she wanted to keep on a kind of external membership, without really belonging. I daresay she found it better than nothing.

18

As her annual time for going away drew near, Mrs. Foyle was noticeably more depressed. She hardly troubled to keep up the fiction that duties in other places kept her from Kellynch this year. I think she must have been certain that we knew of the breach between herself and the Elliots from one source or another. And yet there were moments when she reverted to the old Miranda legend. It was very trying, and very pathetic.

"Oh, my Lord, I wish I hadn't got to go to Leamington," she said. "But my sister's getting old. I don't know if she'll be there next year."

That was true, of course.

"Oh, my Lord, Miranda will miss me," she said. "She always relies on me to make the party go. I take a lot off her hands at Kellynch."

She may have believed that this was true, and I suppose in a sense it was. If she had occupied herself less with her daughter's guests she would not have been banished.

There was nothing we could say or do.

Mary Tucker, however, was not so easily resigned to inaction as Stephen and I were. "My dears, we must

do something about Mrs. Foyle," she said one day, when we were having tea with her.

"I don't see what you can do," said Stephen, carefully repudiating his share in Mary's "we."

Mary stretched out her arms in an expansive gesture and continued in a tone of growing excitement: "My dears, I'm *going* to do something. Miranda has *got* to behave decently to her, and I'm going to see that she does." Her voice rose to a scream.

"That will be very difficult," I said.

Mary, who has enough energy to supply Christminster with electric light, was loath to admit that there was anything she couldn't achieve. She shouted like a war horse about what she was going to do, and I suppose she may have got rid of some superfluous energy that way—she certainly left two of her hearers exhausted. Unfortunately it was one of those cases where energy can do nothing.

"One could appeal to Miranda's better nature," said Tucker.

"If she has such a thing," said Stephen doubtfully.

"We must hope so," said Tucker reproachfully.

"She was always a horrid little thing," said the Vice-Principal of St. Monica's, who happened to be present.

"I shall write to her," said Mary. She seized a pen and sat down at her bureau, scattering on the floor printed appeals for Czech refugees, and a pile of miscellaneous correspondence. After dashing off a few lines, she read them aloud for our admiration.

"We shouldn't dream of intruding on your private affairs, but we can't help seeing how sad your mother

is at not going to Kellynch this year. Of course we don't know what the trouble is between you, or even if there's anything wrong at all. But if there is, we feel sure you would want to make it up if you could only see how wretched and ill she looks. And from what we hear from Cyprian, we can't think she did anything so very dreadful."

The Vice-Principal laughed.

I quoted Sir Andrew Aguecheek: "'But thou liest in thy throat; that is not the matter I challenge thee for.'"

Mary was hurt. "That's so like Christminster," she said. "As soon as one does anything constructive, you all want to criticize and find fault."

She sealed her letter defiantly, but then she couldn't find a stamp to put on it. After all, Mary was not a woman of action—she was a graduate of Christminster, and not of some horrid, red brick university. Tommy picked up the Czech appeals, and soon it was buried underneath them. No doubt he had his own way of combating his wife's indiscretions. But, if I know Mary, this particular indiscretion will only have been postponed. At one of the irregular resurrections, when her bureau gives up its dead, this letter will come to light. If she has a stamp—and that day she very well may have—she will stamp it and post it without bothering to look inside, or to remember what is in it—it is a waste to have written a letter, and not to send it; and anyhow it will show Miranda that she hasn't forgotten her. I think Miranda will get a shock, now, when she opens that letter.

When we next visited Mrs. Foyle we found her occupied with another problem—poverty. The upper flat had remained empty for a quarter after the ejection of the Newsoms, and she had been obliged to remit their arrears of rent in order to get them out of it. When they had gone, a good deal of painting and cleaning was necessary, and it was hopeless to try to come upon them for the outgoing repairs. It had now fortunately been let to an elderly lady, and it has no more history. This person had intended to give musical parties, to which end she had constructed what she called an “esplade” in her front room—sometimes we heard her fluty voice echoing down the stairs. Perhaps it was just as well for Mrs. Foyle that poor Miss Robinson’s health never permitted her to indulge in such excitements. Miss Robinson paid her rent punctually, but had beaten Mrs. Foyle down over the terms.

“Oh, my Lord, I must find something to sell,” said Mrs. Foyle. “I don’t know what I can sell. I’ve hung on to my silver all these years, though sometimes it went into pawn when Miranda was at college—my canteen my father gave me when I married. I suppose I shall have to let it go. I wanted to keep it for Miranda—she won’t get a bit of the Elliot silver after Peter’s dead.”

“Can’t the Elliots do something for you?” I said.

“Oh, I don’t like to ask them, specially just now,” said Mrs. Foyle. She seemed on the verge of saying something about the breach, but quickly saved herself. “Peter’s always rather difficult about money,” she

said. "And Miranda can't do much on her own—the way they've arranged things between them."

"All the same," I began.

Stephen cut in firmly: "We will lend you the money ourselves, unless you get it from them. You're not to part with your silver."

"Certainly you mustn't," I backed him up—little though we cared what forks Miranda had to eat off in her widowhood.

"That's very kind of you," said Mrs. Foyle doubtfully—but really wishing at that moment, I am quite sure, that we would let her alone and not force her to write to her daughter for money.

We stood firm, and Mrs. Preston told us that we had done quite right in doing so. She herself threatened to work for nothing, rather than Mrs. Foyle should sell her things, and to arrange something like a general strike of her creditors—and I think she could certainly have overborne the dairy, so that it did not send in its book, and perhaps the laundry as well. The fishmonger would not have needed to be overborne.

In North Christminster, beyond the orbit of the young gentlemen, tradesmen and their customers are on excellent and even affectionate terms, such as would amaze those parents and guardians who regard all Christminster, in a picturesque mixed metaphor, as a den where the young are fleeced by sharks.

We were not told the result of the application to Peter and Miranda, but it must have been successful, unless indeed Mrs. Foyle found she could rub along somehow without extra funds. At all events nothing

was sold for the moment. Now everything else was forgotten in the little worries attendant on her visit to Leamington.

Mrs. Preston was at first disposed to be pleased at this: "One worry drives out another." But it would have been more than human to be pleased for long when one had, as she had, the task of getting Mrs. Foyle off on the fixed day.

"More than once, sir, I've found myself out in the hall, dancing with rage," she said. "If I'd two ladies like Mrs. Foyle, sir, I should go mental myself."

Her half-conscious, more than half-conscious desire not to go to Leamington showed through every attempt she made at preparation. She developed an uncanny knack of putting things away so safely that she forgot where they were, and they had to be endlessly hunted for. Then she would forget if a thing had been packed or not, and suitcases had to be opened again and unpacked down to the bottom. At times it seemed as if she were deliberately trying to be naughty, like a spoilt child.

"I had to say to her, 'Well, ma'am, you're giving me a lot of trouble,' " said Mrs. Preston. "That made her think, sir, and then she was a bit less forgetful."

And now Mrs. Foyle was impeded not only by the forgetfulness of a mind that doesn't really want to remember, but also by the genuine failure of memory that comes with old age. We noticed this more and more when we went to see her. She couldn't remember even the name of Miranda's last play, nor what part she took. Letters and notices had to be hunted up

—Miranda still wrote quite frequently. Mrs. Foyle muddled about with the envelopes rather pitifully—her poor little stumps, which had been nimbler than most people's fingers, were losing their cunning.

On her better days she attempted some sort of disguise. "Oh," she would say, "it's a brilliant play. I saw such a wonderful notice of it the other day, that I cut it out to show you. Just let me find it. Now where can I have put it, I wonder?"

She might manage to keep up this patter until the notice was found which was to tell her, as well as ourselves, the names she was searching for.

On bad days she made no attempt to keep up pretenses, but simply owned, "I don't seem to remember anything any more, I've gone quite stupid."

There were worse days. On these she would forget things, or would repeat herself without any apology—perhaps without any awareness that she did so.

Ignorant and thoughtless people sometimes say that it must be nice to be forgetful, when there is so much that is sad or disagreeable to remember—and I have heard fools say that in a world of strident noise it must be a good thing to be deaf. But the deaf often tell us that they feel—and in a temporary deafness we always experience—an uncomfortable sensation of stuffiness and constriction; and there are strange, unpleasant noises. From our observation of Mrs. Foyle, we thought her loss of memory must bring an analogous discomfort. Though she might not remember her troubles, she remembered that she had them—she knew that something had laid her life waste, and was perpetually

and painfully racking her brain to find out what it was. Her whole day must be something like those appalling moments of waking, in the first days of a great grief, when one knows that it is no use the sun shining, and yet one does not at once know why—better the days when a loss is never forgotten, even in sleep.

Mrs. Foyle's harassed expression was that of one always looking for something, and dreading to find it—like that of someone looking in a morgue for a lost child. She was only looking for sorrow.

One can understand why the blind are happier than other afflicted people, dreadful as their privation is. Blindness is negative, and not joined to a sensible pain, like loss of memory or hearing. The blind do not see horrors in their night.

She went away to Leamington Spa, and the world went on towards its ruin. We were soon, many of us, again living in a condition of taut misery, perhaps as intense as Mrs. Foyle's. In the library I met an American woman in tears, crying, I supposed, over the agony of Europe.

"Oh," she said, between sobs, "if war breaks out, it means the end of all my work! There are two manuscripts at Wolfenbüttel I just have to collate!"

"You'll be a neutral," I said kindly. "Perhaps you can go there."

"No, I guess I'll just have to go home to Philadelphia," she said, in the profoundest gloom.

Stephen and I could barely speak—we went for silent walks by the river, with a borrowed dog to give us an artificial help towards calm, and then we aban-

doned silence in favor of tortured wonderings about what was going to happen. Stephen still believed that, after days of intolerable strain, we should hear the bells of St. Mary and St. Nicholas ring out for another *Te Deum*, for another last minute reprieve.

"Tommy Tucker will be furious," I said.

"Not if he's tortured for long enough first," said Stephen. "They know their job."

Certainly we felt as if we were in a place of outer darkness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth, when we had to go to the Church Schools of St. Mary and St. Nicholas to get our gas masks; and we felt as if we had been given over to the tormentors, and not to public-spirited fellow citizens engaged in Air-Raid Precautions.

In the dim, wet afternoon our neighbors waited in a queue. One by one they took off their hats and laid aside their glistening umbrellas, to be fitted with this obscene snout. War was already turning us into monsters. There was the neat figure of Miss Poole, raising her mild face for this horrible disguise; there was the great skull of old Waterfield, terrifying with its pendent mask; there was Cheeseman, together with the Shrubsoles; Mary getting hopelessly entangled in her mask; the cheerful fishmonger, the greengrocer and his wife; the dentist and his mother. We might have been the damned, waiting for admission to Hell—and yet, I felt indignantly, some at least of us did not deserve it. I am tired of hearing that the war was a fit punishment for our offenses—were our grandparents, who lived in so much better times, really any worthier

than we? I don't believe it. If I were to write a *Paradiso* there are several of my neighbors in Christminster whom I should not hesitate to place among the Blessed.

Nor were our tormentors devils: this hideous, suffocating transformation of our faces was being effected by one of the doctors, by a Fellow of one of the colleges, and by poor Tommy Tucker himself, his pince-nez insecurely balanced, but shining with anxious good nature. It seemed unreasonable that we should be quietly submitting to this ceremony—I understand that in Hell, where the damned are fully aware of their situation, they scream all the time. But on the whole I felt glad that we were behaving like quiet Christminster people. It made it a little more tolerable.

"I'm thankful Mrs. Foyle isn't here," I said to Stephen. I almost thought that she might have screamed.

It is impossible to foretell what people's reactions will be. At first Mrs. Foyle was very pleased with the war. She wrote stirring patriotic letters from Leamington Spa. She did not propose to linger there in idleness; she wanted to be back in Christminster immediately to do her bit. What her bit was, we were not very sure. I think she hoped to have officers billeted on her, to take hot-water bottles to conscientious objectors in jail, perhaps even to run a canteen—and generally to regain her place as "the pivot of the University."

Mr. Waterfield also was disposed to enjoy what he humorously called "the Emergency."

"I have written to offer my services as a munition

worker," he told us. "I could hardly hope now to pass myself off as a man of military age—though, if I could, I should not scruple to use this pious deception."

People who like talking that particular kind of nonsense, and many do, might have said that the old were being wonderful—such an example to those of the young who, like ourselves, were far less enthusiastic. But of course the war was these old people's plaything, just as it was to children in their first childhood. It was the generations in between who were to have their lives scorched and withered by it. For old Waterfield the long game continued—and he alleviated the occasional tedium, as a small boy alleviates the tedium of cricket, by mischievous breaches of the rules and little games of his own. There was quite a lot of mild fun to be got out of air-raid wardens. Mrs. Foyle's exaltation, on the other hand, lasted only a very few weeks—when the old were depressed by the war, then they were very miserable indeed.

To begin with, she was so frightened—all day long she thought about bombs. Never, one would think, had she valued life so much. Though, like a great many other people, she was willing to offer up the young—or at any rate that indistinctly imagined part of it that belonged to the armed forces—as a burnt sacrifice, she was appalled at the mere possibility of civilian casualties.

"Oh, Mrs. Preston has been splendid," she told us. "She's made my flat so black that not a pin point of light can be seen when the curtains are drawn. Miss

Robinson seems to have a good careful maid. I do hope you're very particular about your black-out."

We were careful, we said, rather coldly.

"It's so important," she said fussily—she may have thought we were rather offhand about it. "You don't want to bring down a bomb on your heads—even *worse*, if you brought one down on someone else's."

It was so obvious what head she was thinking of.

"Do you think old Waterfield is careful enough?" she asked anxiously.

"If he isn't, I'm sure the wardens will soon teach him," we said.

"It's too bad to have someone careless in the road," she said crossly. "He isn't fit to live alone. Couldn't one of you run in every evening and remind him?"

"We shouldn't dream of fussing the poor old man," said Stephen. "Of course, if we saw his light showing, we might tell him."

"It might be too late then," said Mrs. Foyle peevishly. "I really think you ought to look after him. It isn't as if you were doing much to help win the war."

At this time very few people were doing much to help win the war; Mrs. Foyle's own plans had come to nothing, and it was partly that that had made her so cross. She had complete leisure to devote to her fears and, like all frightened people, she was a magnet to attract every rumor that was going about.

"There was nearly an air raid yesterday," was a common remark, although the Christminster sirens were still silent. Perhaps Mrs. Preston had told her some information gleaned from a friend of hers who

had a knowledgeable friend who worked at the Orthopedic hospital.

"Yes, sir, an amber warning at the Orthopedic," was Mrs. Preston's gloss. She herself, however, as she often told us, had no time to worry about such nonsense. She very much annoyed Mrs. Foyle by refusing to carry a gas mask about with her.

"No good suffocating in those things, I tell her, sir. Better just to take a good deep breath of the stuff, and go off quietly."

Mrs. Foyle was taking it out of herself all day, as Mrs. Preston truly observed. Her fears and her failing memory each aggravated the other. She couldn't remember if she had pulled the curtains—and it was contrary to all her habits to pull curtains—or she couldn't remember where she had put her gas mask, and it had to be hunted for high and low. Of course she wouldn't stir without it, even to go in next door and visit us.

"We're told to carry them," she always said self-righteously.

"Do you see a great change in Mrs. Foyle?" Mrs. Preston asked us.

"She's much older than she was last year," said Stephen.

"I don't think she's long for this world, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "I shouldn't be surprised if she passed along this winter, sir. Poor Mrs. Foyle! The machine is running down, sir."

Already the machine was creaking pitifully, but yet there was still motion in the works, and it might go

on for much longer than Mrs. Preston supposed—the poor human machine, that so seldom runs regularly like a clock until the last minute, and only then when its end is to be brutally smashed.

19

MRS. Foyle was continually being urged by Mrs. Preston to give way. At last she had a bad chill, and gave way. When we saw her again, she was stripped of all her protective enthusiasms and was a very tired, sad old woman. At first she seemed to be rather fatter, particularly in the face. Her cheeks were flushed and puffy. Some kind of decay had apparently set in already—it looked as if her flesh were coming away from the bones. Her voice was feeble, and utterance was slow and broken—it seemed to be controlled from a very long way away. Conversation with her was as difficult and unsatisfactory as talking to someone at a long distance on the telephone. And yet, every now and then, there were returns of her old vitality.

She was now able to talk about Kellynch again, so at times she made an effort to talk. A school had taken possession of it for the duration of the war, and the park was full of temporary buildings. The Elliots were out of it, and therefore her own banishment no longer counted—they were receiving a great deal of money and a great deal of credit for giving it up. Meanwhile Peter and Miranda were giving performances to the troops all over the country—they were even flown to

neutral countries to give Shakespeare recitals, as a form of propaganda for English culture. Miranda had been warmly congratulated by several (as yet neutral) Crown Princesses. Cyprian, now an essential member of their staff, seemed safe of having a comfortable war. We were relieved to hear that.

"I like to feel that she's doing something," said Mrs. Foyle, more emotionally than usual. "That they're able to make some use of her genius."

Miranda also seemed to have been melted by the war. She sent quite a lot of letters, and several telegrams.

It was not easy to have much connected conversation with Mrs. Foyle in those days because, apart from everything else, her attention was so distracted by the wireless. She was perpetually fiddling with the knobs of her set when we visited her in her own house, and when she came to see us, she was fretting all the time to get back to it. She made it a pious practice to listen to every mouthful of news—and each time awaited every bulletin in the uneventful winter months of the *Sitzkrieg* with bated breath. She was quite cross with us for not sharing her addiction to this vice, and for being content with the morning paper.

Untormented by this unpleasant machine, she might have got through the long dreary winter much better. While other people found the stationary war boring, yet it did not afflict them very much—it was far less bad than what we had all been keyed up to expect. Christminster was still something like its old self, the young gentlemen still abounded in our streets.

Boys in blue serge suits still sat on the chintz chair covers of our northern suburbs on Sunday afternoons, and still absorbed China tea and hot scones. Though every here and there one noticed that a building had been perverted to military uses—and St. Monica's College was an early victim—arms in our city still yielded to the gown. The forward youth, who would appear, was not yet obliged to forsake his muses dear—in some cases it seemed likely that he would be allowed two years more with them.

While most of us felt some comfort in the thought that people were not yet being killed, Mrs. Foyle heard (often several times over—for she listened to every bulletin) of the few who were. When any British aircraft failed to return, she was in despair; and she was unpleasantly cock-a-hoop over every enemy loss. One did not dare to imagine what she would be like when large-scale operations began. I suggested to her that she might be happier if she followed things less closely.

"I like to take an interest," she said self-righteously.

"You can easily let such an interest become morbid," I said. "To follow the war so closely is to be like an invalid who takes his temperature every ten minutes." But I really knew how useless it was to argue with her.

Old Waterfield, with his happier disposition, continued to enjoy the war. He found, however, certain disadvantages attendant on it. Library hours were shorter because of the absence of several members of the staff, and because several parts of the library had to be closed at dusk, as an efficient black-out was impossible there. Some rare books and manuscripts were not

available for consultation, having been sent into the country for safer storage. He often complained to me of the hardship of having his work interrupted, at his age. I also had work that needed finishing while I was free to do it.

"But I do not grumble," he said cheerfully. "The enforced leisure enables me to work for my country. I have a very large war map on which I am working out some important points of strategy. I shall not be surprised if they revolutionize the course of this war. I can trust you not to engage in careless talk about this? I do not wish to have German or Russian agents breaking into my flat."

I promised not to mention his studies.

"As I wrote to the War Ministry in my preliminary letter," said Mr. Waterfield, "I am in the position of knowing the terrain far better than any general in the field can possibly hope to do. They may have hills in front of them which impede the view. But what *they* see as hills, *I* see as contours printed on a flat map. I am therefore exceptionally well qualified to give advice, with my great knowledge of military history, particularly that of the Persian wars."

It seemed unkind to point out that other people had maps too, even generals in the field. But perhaps Mr. Waterfield really knew as much as they. In these extraordinary days that seemed to make nonsense of all past human experience, nothing seemed more unlikely than anything else. Quite intelligent people were confessedly abandoning history in favor of astrology.

In the absence of events nearer home, Christmin-

ster was taking a certain amount of interest in a war then raging between Finland and Russia. Our hospitals had been cleared of civilian patients to make room for casualties from the Western Front, which did not come in. Nurses sat in the empty wards knitting white woolen helmets for the Finns, while the people of Christminster had influenza, very uncomfortably, at home. Miss Poole's society collected money for Finland and objects for a rummage sale. In pursuit of these we called on Mrs. Foyle, thinking she might be as generous as she was to Spain; nobody could complain that Finland wasn't clean.

She burst into a rage. It was ridiculous, she said, to worry about these far-off people when we had a war of our own on. They were even talking of sending volunteers to Finland, when we should soon need every man we had.

"But," said Stephen gently, "Miss Poole wouldn't dream of sending volunteers anywhere, you know. It's only comforts we're sending."

Mrs. Foyle thought it was the thin end of the wedge, she said. Miss Poole and her society, she complained, took an interest in every country but their own. "It makes me so cross," she said.

We were not so very surprised or distressed at Mrs. Foyle's opinions, what grieved us was the emphasis and ill-temper with which they were expressed—gone were the days when she never passed a moral judgment unfollowed by a condonatory giggle. This time she continued hot and indignant. At first we thought it was another triumph of the evil spirit of war over the

spirit of toleration—which had, if possible, been too strong in her before. And then we saw that it was something that made us even sadder still—it was part of a nervous illness that had her in its grip. She had to work up every emotion now until it was beyond control.

On this occasion her nose started bleeding, and checked her eloquence. Fortunately Mrs. Preston was still about, and we were able to fetch her.

“I’m very glad, sir, she’s bleeding, sir,” said Mrs. Preston. “Nature’s way of relieving her. Otherwise I should be afraid of her having a fit one of these days, the way she goes on. She’s always creating, these days; now that does her no good, sir.”

And one of those days she had a fit. Mrs. Preston found her lying senseless on the floor, with the wireless on and innocently playing dance music. We have always supposed that it had just said something that made her angry. What a pity that she did not embrace a different religion: even in this world it might have brought her more consolation, and it could hardly have annoyed her so much.

The position was a serious one. A second attack of that nature is often worse than the first, and though Mrs. Preston was willing and anxious to do the nursing herself, the doctor convinced her that Mrs. Foyle ought to go to a hospital or nursing home. It was extremely difficult to find any place that could take her, cleared as they all were in readiness for war wounded. But Mrs. Preston, as we had never doubted that she would, managed to find something.

"There was the home, sir, where Miss Phyllis had her baby, sir." (Miss Phyllis's maiden name had been Tanqueray—and of course she had relinquished it for Jones or Cumberbatch or something before she had her baby.) "I knew the matron there would do anything for me, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "And so she promised to take poor Mrs. Foyle."

"She's a very sweet woman, the matron, sir," was the next report. "She seems to have taken quite a fancy to Mrs. Foyle. Yes, I think she'll get on quite well at the home, sir."

Bulletins continued to come in quite satisfactorily, and Stephen and I did not worry very much; we rather expected the illness to take the same course as it had before. Moreover we had other preoccupations.

The heavy winter had broken at last and, like everyone else, we saw the coming of spring with apprehension—it might bring the end of the world. Meanwhile it brought milder days and we walked by the river, that still crackled along between ice walls at each side. In shady places there were still lumps of unmelted snow. But here and there snowdrops were coming out, and there was a breath of the soft spring air that is more intoxicating in Christminster than in any other place on earth. With the physical resurrection of the world, one could not prevent the resurrection of hopes—though they would probably be delusive and tormenting.

"Would it be wiser to strangle them?" I asked Stephen.

"No," he said. "It is something to have had them.

We ought to be happy every moment that we can, when so much misery may be coming."

I have no doubt he shared my own thought, that we ought to be happy as long as we could be together. Neither of us knew how long that would be. We were very kind to each other, and life had a kind of frail beauty in these days, which makes them seem so much happier in retrospect than they could have been at the time. At the time the sword hanging over us was too constantly in our thoughts for happiness.

Again Mrs. Preston was able to inform us that Mrs. Foyle's illness had "passed the zither." Her speech had not yet returned, but she showed some signs of understanding. This time her system had been greatly weakened by the attack, and the doctors said that it would need the utmost care to nurse her through to convalescence.

"I think we shall save her," said Mrs. Preston, with enthusiasm—we had not realized that she had been so bad that her safety was in doubt. "I think, sir, she'll be spared this time," she continued.

She was delighted. Mrs. Preston is one of those admirable people who accept the decrees of Providence not only with resignation, but with pleasure. If the illness had gone the wrong way, fond as she was of Mrs. Foyle, she would probably have said: "A good thing if she passes, sir—a good thing really." But now that there was a fair chance of recovery, she was delighted to enter into competition with Death and to beat him out of the field.

Soon preparations for Mrs. Foyle's convalescence

had to be put in hand. She had reached a state in which she no longer needed the special services of the nursing home, and it was not justifiable to keep her on there: her room was urgently needed. Patients were waiting for surgical operations till they could be taken in. But the matron had been able to find two nurses who would return with her to her own home, and of course Mrs. Preston was eager to run the household—she even enlisted the help of her husband's niece.

We were all looking forward to the return as a stage on the road to complete recovery. The matron had written to Miranda Elliot, and we naturally expected her to be pleased that everything was so comfortably arranged and that all trouble and responsibility had been taken off her hands. Stephen and I had bought large bunches of narcissi to welcome Mrs. Foyle home; we imagined she would have sufficient consciousness to notice them, and to be pleased. We gave them into the hands of Mr. Preston's niece, and we were leaving the house; and at that moment Mrs. Preston herself rode up on her bicycle. We hardly knew her. For the first time we saw her untidy—it may well have been the first time in her life that she appeared in a Christminster street with her hat awry and her hair disheveled. She was angry, and she had been crying—she was still crying.

Stephen quietly took her bicycle from her. All three of us waited in an awed silence. It would take something to make Mrs. Preston cry—death would not be enough.

"That Lady Elliot, sir," she said. And then tears and

indignation choked her for a moment. "She's telegraphed to matron, sir, that Mrs. Foyle is not to come home. She's to go to the infirmary at the workhouse."

"What!" we cried incredulously; these things only happen in nightmares, was what Stephen and I both felt. But it was no dream, and we were broad waking.

"The workhouse infirmary!" repeated Mrs. Preston, and she choked again.

We were all struck silent for a moment, and then all began talking at once.

"What can she mean?"

"How wicked!"

"What a shame! What a cruel thing!"

"I couldn't believe it, myself!"

"Poor, poor Mrs. Foyle!"

"Can't one do anything to prevent it?"

"I think it's too sad for words, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "I don't know how she can do it, sir; after all, it's her mother."

"What does she do it for?" we repeated.

"Wants to kill her off, sir, in my opinion," said Mrs. Preston decidedly. "She was getting on so nicely too, sir, that it seems a pity, really. She won't live long in that place, sir. Always had such a horror of it, sir. It will drive her mental, I expect, as soon as she finds where they've put her."

"It's not as if the Elliots were poor people," said Stephen.

"They might have more heart if they were, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "In my humble position, I'd never let anyone of mine go to that place."

"Can't anything be done?" I said.

"Nothing at all, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "Lady Elliot's the family, and she's given orders. We can't go against them, not without Mrs. Foyle saying something—and she's not in a state to say what she wishes—never will be again, I fear, poor soul."

"I'm not sure that I want her to recover now," said Stephen sadly. "Better if she never quite realizes what has been done to her."

"That's what that Miranda is counting on," said Mrs. Preston, pronouncing the name with searing scorn. "But you'll see, Mrs. Foyle will realize quite enough to know where she's being taken—the poor lamb!"

"It will break her heart," I said.

"Not a doubt of that, sir," said Mrs. Preston. She said it with some relish, as if she expected that Miranda would then, too late, be sorry for what she had done. Stephen and I had no such expectation, and if we had, it would have given us no comfort. We felt we were being compelled to assist at a scene of torture as cruel as anyone reads of in the newspapers, and that we were powerless to lift a finger. All our feeling was for the victim; the ultimate repentance of the butcher could not interest us.

When we had thoughts free to turn on Miranda, it was backwards rather than forwards that we were inclined to turn them. We did not care if she lived to be sorry for what she had done—we wanted to know why she had done it. The Devil tempted her, no doubt; but what inducements can he have offered to persuade

her to such an odious course of action which could hardly fail to disgrace her in the eyes of her friends?

We all like to save money—and perhaps she may have told herself that her mother was dying and unconscious, and that it was wasteful and sentimental to spend much money on her. She may even have thought, like Judas, that the money might be laid out to more advantage upon the poor—this Judas-thought is often the only thought that people give to the poor and needy. All this would have to be maintained in the teeth of the evidence—but Satan has never much bothered about accuracy in his facts.

This is the best case we have ever been able to make out for Miranda—and I should like to hope there is a better, because it really will not hold water. And it is not pleasant to have to think of our old friend's daughter as a master of heartlessness; it is even less pleasant to think of our old friend as the victim of an almost unparalleled ingratitude and barbarity.

We are taught not to pass judgment on people—and we know very little about them. But if we may not hate the sinner, we are to hate the sin. On actions we must, if we have any moral consciousness, pronounce at least some sort of tentative verdict, like that of a coroner's court. When I heard of Mrs. Foyle's relegation to the workhouse it seemed the most wicked act I had ever fully realized—things in the newspapers, thank God, do not come home to one with such force. I then believed for the first time, not that Hell existed—which I have always accepted as a part of revealed truth—but that there are some people in it; a matter

about which we possess (I understand) no certain information.

"Who would have *believed* it?" cried Mary Tucker. "I should *never* have thought Miranda capable of doing such a thing."

"Would you have thought anyone capable of doing such a thing?" asked Stephen.

Mary admitted that she wouldn't. Even Herr Hitler, she thought, would not have done such a thing; she had seen a photograph of him feeding sparrows at Berchtesgarden. He could not be quite devoid of humanity.

"If anyone could do such a thing, it is Miranda Foyle," said the Vice-Principal of St. Monica's, who was again present.

And there was a *posteriori* proof that she was right: Miranda had done it.

"How unhappy she must be!" said Tommy Tucker.

We all thought his sympathy wasted upon her, and told him so—not without heat.

"I can't bear it," said Stephen suddenly.

"I'm not going to bear it!" said Mary, with energy. "I'm going to fetch Mrs. Foyle out of the nursing home myself, and bring her back to her own house, and two nurses with her—then we'll just send the bills in to Miranda!"

In fact she went there and threw herself hard against insurmountable obstacles. The matron praised her kindness of heart, and her good intentions, and expressed real regret that they must remain ineffective. She had no choice but to carry out Lady Elliot's or-

ders, though she had carried them out with shame and abhorrence. Mrs. Foyle had been taken to the work-house that afternoon.

A kind action is perhaps never entirely wasted—after everything was over, the matron confided to Mrs. Preston that Mary had made her laugh on a day when she had never in her life felt less like laughing.

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Mrs. Preston took a few comforts from Mrs. Foyle's house to mitigate the rigors of the infirmary. She also took our narcissi. The next day was a visiting day, and Stephen and I arranged to go there with her.

Again we approached the large muddy-gray building, a little outside Christminster, carrying our parcels from the bus stop. We had brought orange juice and chicken jelly; and Mrs. Preston, who had some useful friends at a farm, had managed to get some country butter and a few new-laid eggs.

We rang the bell, and waited—dismally remembering how Mrs. Foyle had stood with us on the same spot two years ago, and had quoted: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." Now, no doubt, she had abandoned hope. I felt almost afraid to enter; it was rather like taking chicken jelly to the damned.

"Her hair!" said Stephen suddenly. "Will she want us to see her without it?"

"Oh, they won't have taken it away from her, hardly, sir," said Mrs. Preston. "She's well enough to sit up in bed and look nice. They'll be used to old people, sir, with hair and teeth that have to be put on and off."

We felt reassured.

"Visitors for Foyle?" said someone at the office. "In the mental ward, to the right, please."

We looked at each other; what could one say?

"It's a shame, sir!" said Mrs. Preston, the first to recover breath.

"Why on earth is she there?" Stephen asked someone, in an unsteady voice.

"Her mind isn't very clear," said the official voice coldly. "We may consider moving her, if it becomes clearer."

We walked along the echoing passages of "the House," which had dwarfed poor little Mrs. Foyle to the size of a midget the last time we were there.

"People to see you, Foyle," said the nurse.

"You might say 'Mrs. Foyle,' " I told her angrily.

She tossed her head. "We haven't time for distinctions here," she said.

No use to say more—one remembered that Mrs. Foyle was in her power, and that it would not do to offend her.

I don't know how much the thing on the bed understood. It was a poor, little ugly thing, like a wizened baby—with a skull as bald as old Waterfield's. Not a trace of eyebrow now remained. The mouth was half-open, and in the eyes—horror. The little stunted hands gripped the sheet.

"What have they done to you?" one wanted to cry out.

Stephen and I stood at the foot of the bed. I saw a tear trickle down the side of his nose, and felt my own eyes brimming over. I have never in my life been more

sorry at any sight. Here was a lively, warmhearted little person who loved us, trapped and powerless, and hideously degraded, lying shut in this horrible place till death released her—for most certainly she was never going to recover from the shock of this treatment. In sympathy I felt the walls close in suffocatingly round me. If she screamed and screamed until they had to move her, I should thoroughly have approved; but no doubt she hadn't the strength.

Mrs. Preston went to her. "There, dear," she said.

A little hand closed round hers, and held like a vice.

With immense difficulty a small, broken voice spoke. "Take me—home."

And again, with increased urgency, it repeated: "Home!"

"I'll try what I can do, dear, later," said Mrs. Preston.

"Now!" said the poor little voice, using up its last powers.

"No, I can't, dear, not now," said Mrs. Preston. "But I'll see what I can do to make you a bit more comfortable."

The tone was so kind that the horror faded out of the eyes, and they continued to follow her about, when she was obliged to detach herself from the grip of the hand.

Mrs. Preston began making a thorough examination—the poor resources of the place were soon exposed. Mrs. Foyle had no hot-water bottle in her bed, and nothing by her bedside but a thick chunk of bread and margarine, and an enamel mug with condensed

milk and water in it. She got hold of the nurse and hotly remonstrated with her.

"You seem to think we're a smart nursing home," said that young woman nastily.

"Indeed I don't," said Mrs. Preston. "One look in here shows its the poorhouse. But I suppose Mrs. Foyle's people have paid for some extra comforts? She's not used to anything as rough as this."

"Not they," rejoined the nurse.

"Well, I suppose I can cut her some nice thin bread and butter? I suppose if I bring a waterbottle of my own, you won't grudge her the hot water?" said Mrs. Preston.

"I'll do what I can," said the girl, not unkindly.

Mrs. Foyle had hardly noticed us, her gaze was so fixed on Mrs. Preston—who came back to her bedside after her talk with the nurse.

"Miranda," said Mrs. Foyle.

Our eyes fell.

"She . . . put . . . me . . . here," she continued.

Things were gone too far for us to lie or pretend.

"Oh, ma'am, she'd be sorry if she saw you now, madam," cried Mrs. Preston, in a burst of grief. It was the only thing that could be said that wasn't false.

"Curse . . . her," said Mrs. Foyle, still in a completely expressionless voice.

And then she began whimpering, like a baby, because we had to leave her. In the passage we met the matron from the nursing home, who had come to pay a visit.

How clouded, one wondered, was the poor tortured mind? I don't think it had room for many words, perhaps only two words and one at a time, and these two were "Home" and "Miranda." Saints on their deathbeds have needed only two words, "God," and "Heaven"—so all Mrs. Foyle's thoughts must have been expressed by the two words that named her object of love, and her place of refuge.

Home—the familiar, reassuring background of everyday life—so loved when one was hopelessly cut off from it. All Christminster lay in between—the whole route of the number two bus, through a working-class suburb, through the university city, and through the greater part of our own residential district. The wet streets she had skidded along in the bus, or splashed along on foot, carrying her shopping basket. Joints of New Zealand mutton, to be palmed off on the lodgers as Southdown, scones—the kind Miranda loved, little cakes for Ursula's tea parties, sardines for her own frugal and solitary meals, wool to be knitted into unwanted wraps for Miranda; the rations of two wars . . . one had to pass the cinemas, where she had clasped Mrs. Preston's hand in the darkness; St. Monica's College, where her clever daughter had been the most brilliant student; the Sacred Heart, where the Crucified, with outstretched arms asked: *What is it to you?* Ah, but now she might be pardoned for wondering if there were a sorrow greater than her own.

Home—where, for its loneliness, one often dreaded to arrive. But yet the liberty and privacy when one had turned the key in the lock! A fire burning, tea, and per-

haps Mrs. Preston might be there—Andrew or Stephen might drop in for a moment. The last post might even bring a letter from Miranda; somewhere in it, that false, big, round hand might say “Mummy, darling.”

Here the light never went out, voices were never entirely silent—and every now and then a rough voice said: “Bath time, Foyle!” Brisk young hands pulled one about, greased one with coarse yellow soap. And it was so tiring, one was so mortally tired.

And Miranda. “Mummy, why haven’t you got any fingers?” Then the curiosity of babyhood changing into the schoolgirl’s hostility for anything abnormal—anything that might put her at a disadvantage with the other girls. “Miranda Foyle’s mother hasn’t any fingers.” Tom Foyle’s coarse laugh, and Miranda’s laugh in unison. The realization that the normal father and daughter were together in this, against her, the freak.

There would be happier pictures: the family excursion when Miranda was cross and tired, and her father put it right with a joke; the great news of Miranda’s scholarship at St. Monica’s; her recitations to friends in the drawing room—Cheeseman’s admiration; the Elliot wedding—strawberries and cream and ices in the little garden. Going up to London to see Miranda on the stage.

But underneath it all, underneath the great Shakespearean speeches, there sounded in the bass that mocking laugh—and angry impatient words. “Mother, how can you! . . . Oh, Mother, how vulgar! . . . What

a dreadfully common thing to do!" She had always been a disadvantage to Miranda, even if she had slaved for her, had worked the one joint of her fingers to the bone for her. Miranda had never loved her, and now had forsaken her in her old age.

The walls closed round, of this brightly lit, coarse, antiseptic-smelling prison. Oh, this great tearing spasm of pain and grief, was it going mad?

She gave a little, feeble cry.

"Shut up, Foyle, there's a good girl," said a nurse jocosely.

That is how one pictures those terrible days—fortunately they were not many.

During her time in the infirmary Mrs. Foyle was faithfully and constantly visited by Mrs. Preston, for whom officially authorized days and hours did not exist; she succeeded in obtaining unlimited access. We gave her money with which to buy any little thing she cared to take, and she brought back daily bulletins—they grew steadily worse.

"Much weaker, sir, not long for this world, sir," was the news on the day after our visit. "They've killed her, poor lamb."

"She didn't hardly seem to know me, sir," on the following day.

"She's sinking, sir," on the third and fourth days.

On the fifth day she died.

When we heard this news we made Mrs. Preston sit down and have a cup of tea with us. We all three gave vent to our angry grief.

"It's a cruel thing," said Stephen.

"I still can't understand it," I said. "Such inhuman wickedness—and for what?"

"Well, sir, she's at rest, poor little soul," said Mrs. Preston. "Cursed that bad woman with her last breath, too, sir," she added, with considerable satisfaction. "That Miranda will never thrive, sir, with her mother's curse on her."

It was a pardonable exaggeration: Mrs. Foyle breathed for five days after uttering her curse. I should like to think that before dying her sentiments had become more Christian; there is no unlikelihood about that—the old habit of love was so strong that she may have blessed Miranda later in her heart. As far as Miranda herself is concerned, I naturally do not care in the least—but I hope that unhappy little soul departed in peace.

The undignified little body was driven through the wet streets of Christminster; the few young gentlemen who wore hats took them off as it passed. It lay for a while behind the alabaster rood screen and between the shiny choir stalls of the church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas. The vicar read to us the tremendous promises of its resurrection—we should see it reanimated, but no longer stunted and disfigured.

If any life needed completion or compensation in another, it was surely the life that had just ended.

"If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" asked St. Paul, by the vicar's mouth.

One could understand why women always dislike him so much. He had had a public life, a man's life,

and not a little human glory to set against its heroic discomforts. I wanted some advantage to Mrs. Foyle for her years of humbler struggle with lodgers and tradesmen, for her lonely years, and for her great and pathetically wasted love. I wanted her, who had been so ugly and deformed in the life of time, to be eternally beautiful—and to find and enjoy all that she had timidly and confusedly looked for on earth.

One small posthumous distinction was hers. Mr. Waterfield had come to church and during library hours too. He had heard of her pitiful end, and wished to do her honor. He now spoke of her chivalrously as "my kinswoman."

"Though it is with her daughter that I have a distant connection by marriage," he said. "Her I mean to disown after this abominable conduct. My presence here today is then scarcely logical."

If it did not do credit to his head, at least it did credit to his heart, particularly as he did not care for funerals.

"I shall not accompany you to the cemetery," he said. "I find that too vivid a reminder of one's mortality. Moreover I strongly disapprove of interment. Cremation is in my opinion the only method of disposing of our mortal part in which there is any future. I am a life member of the Cremation Society. If you were not, unfortunately, a Roman, I should strongly recommend you to join. They spare no pains to collect one's corpse from almost *anywhere*."

I had been hoping and praying that Mrs. Foyle might enjoy a place of refreshment, light and peace

—a compensation for the tragedy of her life. But yet, I wondered later, do those who say there is no resurrection have as much cause to weep at the end of a life, as one has been told? Is it not something, at least, that it is over? Is it not everything?

“We give thee hearty thanks,” said the clergyman, “for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world.” To this Stephen and I, Mrs. Preston, Mary Tucker, the matron of the nursing home and what other sympathizers stood by, could from our hearts answer “Amen.”

There were two tool sheds near the grave.

“Oh, how she would have *liked* that!” cried dear Mary, looking, I suppose, for some ray of comfort on that miserable afternoon.

And she did succeed in making us smile.

This was the farewell of Christminster to Mrs. Foyle, and she is now a little part of the history of our great city—and one of the saddest parts.

A few days later Cyprian came down for a week end. He told us how grieved Miranda had been at her mother’s death, how tragic it was that her duties did not allow her to come once to Christminster during her last illness, how sorry she was that at the last minute she was prevented from coming to the funeral. We all turned on him in anger—even his brother.

He was surprised. “You’re all so uncharitable,” he said.

But he didn’t even ask our charity for Miranda. He praised her for being realistic and unsentimental. He

said that Mrs. Foyle could have had no idea where she was, and therefore it didn't matter where she was. It was wasting time and money to have two women nursing her in her own house. It was like spending a lot of money on a dead body—he supposed that was the sort of bourgeois thing we should approve of. In these days it would be unpatriotic, as well as absurd. Miranda had shown a proper independence, not caring what people might say.

“Then she has no right to object to anything we say,” said Stephen dryly. “You can tell her what we are all saying, if you like.”

“And Mrs. Foyle knew perfectly well where she was,” I added, “and hated it.”

“Miranda didn't know that,” said Cyprian weakly.

“It was her business to know,” said Mary. “You can't get round it, Cyprian. There can't be any excuse for what she's done.”

“God forgive her!” said Tommy.

“And even if Mrs. Foyle was a dead body—and she wasn't,” I said, “one doesn't throw one's mother's body on the rubbish heap, or leave it to be buried by the parish.”

Cyprian tried to evade the point. He said it was extraordinary to come down to Christminster and find us all seriously discussing an old woman's last illness—as if we were a set of charwomen—when the Germans were sweeping over Europe, and all our way of living was threatened, and our lives too. He then struck an attitude of weary displeasure.

“If our way of living leads to nothing better than

Miranda's treatment of her mother, it doesn't matter what happens to us," I said. "One sees now that Kell-lynn and all its pretensions to civilization just meant nothing at all."

"Right and wrong are always worth talking about," said Tucker.

"But when the issue's so *small*," said Cyprian, "and there are so many bigger things. . . ."

"Then one can distinguish right and wrong all the more clearly," said Stephen. "Big things are more involved, and the responsibility for them is always divided. It would be easier to find excuses for Hitler than for Miranda Elliot."

I do not know how far Cyprian was Miranda's accredited apologist—at all events I am sure he went back to London with the complaint that Christminster was little-minded and half asleep. As a parting shot he told us that we needed a few bombs to wake us up, and that we were soon likely to get them.

The Christminster Post, I am glad to say, saw things as we did; at least that was the conclusion we drew from the guarded report it published of Mrs. Foyle's death.

"The death occurred last Tuesday, in the infirmary of the Christminster Poor-Law Institution, of Mrs. Foyle, a well-known resident in this city for many years. Her only daughter, the celebrated actress Miranda Foyle, is in private life married to the famous actor, Sir Peter Elliot, who is one of the largest land-owners in Somerset."

That is something for Miranda to stick in her press-cutting album.

Unlike Cyprian, I am disposed to think that it showed our good hearts that we in Christminster could still think so much of Mrs. Foyle when all our way of life was threatened—and much of life in Christminster is of a traditional character, made up of the habits of hundreds of years: a violent change in the world would break more hearts there than in most places.

Soon the threats became more menacing, and the lives of some among us were, in fact, broken up. Then perhaps Mrs. Foyle did begin to recede from our minds; if we thought of her, it might be to envy her deliverance from the miseries of this sinful world. Her body lay at peace in the cemetery at the top of the Woodbury road among neighbors, like dear old Mrs. Cheeseman. Who knew the fate of our bones?

All through that terrible and lovely summer, as cheery blossom gave way to lilac and laburnum, and they in turn to flowering chestnut, Christminster spread out her gardens to the dangerous, airplane-inviting moonlight, whispering with an agonized intensity from her towers the last enchantments of the middle age.

There, still, were our young barbarians all at play—who knew how it would all end? Seeing them about in the streets, I looked at the young gentlemen of the doomed generation with a new respect and pity. I remembered the words of that holy old man, whom

the greatest son of modern Christminster used to call "my Saint Philip." "*Salvete flores martyrum*," he used to say when he met the students of the English College in Rome, before they went to face Queen Elizabeth's hangmen and torturers. I supposed these innocents were shortly going to be butchered too, but for them no crown of glory. If they had cried: "Now God be cursed, who hath matched us with this hour," who could blame them?

Meanwhile they acted plays with enormous assiduity, and the summer gardens rang proudly with English verse. Perhaps, like the Athenians, we should sit at a play one afternoon and hear that everything was lost. I hope, I think, we had enough Athenian spirit to have sat till the end of *The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Paris was gone, and one did not like to speculate what flag would be flying over Christminster in the next academic year, nor what ruler the vicar of St. Mary and St. Nicholas would have to beseech the Almighty to bless and preserve. In those days pain it was to be alive, and to be young was very Hell.

At this time it was my lot to go away. I went out alone to say good-by to Christminster. "Beautiful city, so serene, so lovely."

I sat on a seat by the river, watching the sun as it filtered through a chestnut tree. The light, reflected up from the water, rippled gently over the leaves in an upstream direction, making gray patterns among the green and producing a strange, subaqueous effect. There was a bird flitting in and out of the leaves, and a

wind which snapped off the unformed chestnut fruit and made it fall with sudden plops to the ground. A fair-haired boy in gray flannels punted a girl in a red frock downstream: they were both lovely creatures, in harmony with their setting. Not so an old fat man dressed in a striking shade of blue, with an auburn wig, who passed by carrying a panama hat and wearing a pink rose in his buttonhole—a fantastic figure in this beautiful world. I could have sat there forever, hearing the colleges of Christminster chiming the quarters of the hours, one after the other, so that to a lazy ear the sound would seem continuous.

I walked through the cloisters of my college, and read the tablets in academic Latin with a vague, comforting sense of unity with a great and civilized past—even if its last chapter were now being written. Wherever my bones lie, I am *Collegii Verbi Dei apud Christimonasterienses olim scholaris*: in the hour of death and in the day of judgment that may not matter very much, but nothing can take it away.

In the chapel they were at Evensong—Tallis in the Dorian mode. It was a solemn Christminster saint's day service, sung by two clergymen and an exquisite choir to three or four people and, I suppose, to the Almighty. The vile Victorian glass, red, purple and green, shed lovely patterns of colored light on the stone. A deaf and High Church old lady was getting into trouble with her ear trumpet, which she constantly had to remove in order to cross herself.

How much I loved Christminster! If all this could go on forever, just as it was, how very little I cared

what happened to the rest of the world. Perhaps I should never really understand life anywhere else. Here I completely understood it.

I looked one moment into the library. *Plurimi pertransibunt, sed multiplex erit scientia* . . . And there was old Waterfield bending over his multiple learning. He looked up for a moment to wish me farewell, and to offer me his prayers. I should probably need them.

And then I walked home, into the gothic north—my Christminster, with its towers and spires, its plate tracery, its crockets and stringcourses, its ogival porches and its flying buttresses. It is where my life had been with Stephen, and I had to say good-by to him the next morning.

21

FIVE years later I came back to Christminster to tidy up our things, and to close the flat. The war had just come to an end, in circumstances of shattering horror. Our city was still American-occupied, and some of the citizens found the spirits to join with our visitors in some sort of rejoicings in the rainy streets.

I went to a Sunday tea party at the Tuckers, to find out if life still went on the same after all these cruel years; and at once I could see that it did.

"My dear," cried Mary, "Tommy was marvelous this morning. He broke off *bang* in the middle of the Communion Service to pray for the atomic bomb!"

Irresistibly my mind went to the rhyme about the Buff Orpington hen, who dined with a goose and a wren. I nearly finished it aloud: "'Bless, oh Lord,' said the goose, 'These gifts to our use, and us to thy service, Amen.'"

Tommy beamed. I could not bring myself to ask him what he had found to say to the Almighty about the atomic bomb—a subject that one could discuss more easily with the Devil.

Various people present came to the conclusion, oddly comforting to themselves, that we were now

living in a new Atomic Age, and that all past learning and thought was out of date. They appeared shockingly ready, not to say eager, to abandon all intellectual pursuits on this flimsy pretext.

Nevertheless Mary was ready to take it all back again in her next sentence. She was still excited by the minor intelligentsia of Christminster. While I had been away the gaps in its ranks had been filled up, she told me, by the most *thrilling* people; and it sounded more bogus than ever.

"The Jews, my dear! The Poles, my dear!" she said.

The city was pullulating with Central European genius, and she could not imagine how I could bring myself to leave it.

But if she had thought for a moment, Mary was quite kindhearted enough to understand. The only person I wanted would not come back to Christminster again: Stephen had been dead for more than a year. I shall say no more about that. And I do not mean, sentimentally, that I cannot bear to—I can bear anything—but honestly and humbly that I haven't the technique. But I could say how tedious life is without him. I could say something of the heartache with which I walked under the dripping branches of trees leaning out of the drenched gardens of our residential suburb—oh, beloved city, to which my heart is tied by a thousand nerve-strings, and all of them twisted with pain. . . .

With perfect sense and sensibility—and a complete lack of sentimentality, for she had cared for him too much—Mrs. Preston helped me to go through "poor

Mr. Stephen's things." He had left them in very good order.

I made a call on old Waterfield. Now the movement of that great, aged head was infinitely slow, and its utterance difficult.

"My chief interest in your time used to be in the Inquisition, I fancy," he said. "You may be surprised to learn that my present preoccupation is rather with Monasticism—I think it may carry me as far as Brussels when travel is easier."

"You look very well," I said untruthfully.

"I fear I shall never mount a bicycle again," said Mr. Waterfield ruefully. "That cursed inflammation of the kidneys from which I suffered in the winter of 1940, shortly after your departure overseas, was followed by one of the complications which it brings at times—weakness of the heart, which now forces me to stop and rest when walking every few hundred yards. It has also made me absolutely *useless* for our war effort. It was a great blow when it smote me in March, 1941—just as I was planning to renew the offer of my services for munition work." He paused. "I hope you are returning here to settle down?" he said.

No, I told him, I did not care to come back alone.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, nodding his enormous skull, not without sympathy. "I consider that your brother was murdered," he continued. "The Germans had no right to touch him: he was a non-combatant and was tending the wounded."

I could not let that pass: Stephen disliked injustice of that sort.

"They were not aiming particularly at him," I said. "He was struck by a fragment of an exploding bomb."

"Ah, a *boomb*," said Mr. Waterfield, with much satisfaction. "I am *very* glad to hear he was killed by a *boomb*."

If, when I left him to go upstairs, I had been able to tell Stephen that, I expect that we should both have laughed. By myself, I could not find it funny. And yet I still have to tell Stephen things, though without any belief that he hears them. It is too late to change my way of thinking now—I hope it will last my time.

"No, sir, you can't stay in this house," said Mrs. Preston. "And even if poor Mr. Stephen had been spared, I shouldn't wish it for you. The neighborhood has gone down so, with these foreigners, sir."

She looked upon our Central European visitors with a less loving eye than Mary. Of course they are both right, and it is all very difficult. One would like the good and learned from all over the world to come to Christminster, but if they come in too large numbers, and stay too long, then it will no longer be quite the same Christminster to which they have come.

They would not have influenced me either way, if I were in doubt whether to stay or to go. Our city, untouched by the war, is eternally beautiful: if I have torn myself from her last enchantments, she will enchant generations more of Englishmen. I will not say that I cannot bear to live there at present, but that I do not choose to bear it. After death I like to hope that I may be allowed to revisit our gardens and colleges, or to walk again by moonlight under the laburnums

and chestnuts of the gothic north, gazing with undiminished wonder at its fantastic pinnacled towers. I should like to spend my eternity in Christminster as a beneficent and loving ghost—and not alone.

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